

THE DARK HOUSE

OF E. A. ROBINSON

psychological themes
in the poetry of
Edwin Arlington Robinson

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T H E D A R K H O U S E O F

E. A.

ROBINSON

Where a faint light shines alone,
Dwells a Demon I have known.
Most of you had better say
"The Dark House", and go your way.
Do not wonder if I stay.

A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s

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S.C.Harrex.

P r e f a c e

There will yet be left a few
Themes availing -

- From "Momus"

The "tremendous force of analogy", with which Henry James achieved confrontation of fissured aspects of personality and of culture "in the depths of the house, of the past, of that mystical other world that might have flourished"¹, is conspicuous in the poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson. It is more than the mere dynamic of image-making, which characterises much poetry of the present age. It is infused in Robinson's attitude to life, his psychological realism, his implied values, and his primary symbols. Like the sailor in "Lost Anchors", the poet made of his 'legend' 'a manifest Analogy.'² (p.578)

The Robinsonian Analogy is a predominantly psychological structure proportioned according to the poet's main interest - human nature - and essential aim - inferential disclosure of inner realities. It is a dark house in which the occupants live and die psychic lives and psychic deaths. It is not unlike James' "house on the jolly corner", the archetypal analogy of man and house of which Spencer Brydon, the central character in "The Jolly Corner", becomes so acutely aware in the time of his spiritual crisis:

"The quaint analogy quite hauntingly remained with him, when he didn't indeed rather improve it by a still intenser form : that of his opening a door behind which he would have made sure of finding nothing, a door into a room shuttered and void, and yet so coming, with a great suppressed start, on some quite erect confronting presence, something planted in the middle of the place and facing him through the dusk."

The house symbolism and the "alter-ego" situation depicted in "The Jolly Corner" are comparable to Robinson's poetic postulates, the significance of which are more clearly perceived in terms of psychological analogies.

Psychoanalysis has drawn attention to the ontogenetic and phylogenetic significance of house symbolism. James and Robinson found the symbol to be a convenient means of expressing psychic dilemma and of depicting, in plausible images, aspects of the unconscious life. A man wanders through the darkness of his house, opening and closing 'mortal', 'inner', 'wrong' or 'forgotten' doors (as the poet variously describes them), in quest of identity, in search of his soul. 'This treacherous and imperfect house of man' (p.1028), the poet describes him on one occasion. He may be, like Brydon, on the "threshold" of self-realisation or, like Avon in Avon's Harvest, on the edge of doom. He may, like Nightingale in The Glory of the Nightingales, erect a pretentious mansion on a foundation of evil and guilt ; or, like Bartholow in Roman Bartholow, finally escape his 'ancestral prison'.

"There are still some gods to please,

And houses are built without hands, we're told." (p.48)

Penn-Raven tells Bartholow that his "dreams have taken" him
"far from home" (p.819) ; gives the example of a man, who

"Sure that his house that was not made with hands

Was built forever, ... was too sure to see;" (p.820)

and later observes that "Negation is a careless architect." (p.826)

Matthias heeds similar warnings of his own "inner voice",
actually a projection phantasy, and at the end prepares to
restore the 'tower' of 'self'. He learns, like Brydon, that:

"the development of personality means more than the mere fear
of bringing monsters into the world, or the fear of isolation.

It also means fidelity to the law of one's being." ⁴

The more mature of Robinson's characters share Brydon's
psychologically "prodigious journey" and experience "a sensation
more complex than had ever before found itself consistent with
sanity", ⁵ while the more unhappy representatives of human
psychology, of whom Avon is the most conclusive example, are
destroyed in the "rage of personality" ...

"the stranger, whoever he might be, evil, odious, blatant,
vulgar, had advanced as for aggression, and he knew
himself give ground. Then harder pressed still, sick
with the force of his shock, and falling back as under the
hot breath and the roused passion of a life larger
than his own, a rage of personality before which
his own collapsed, he felt the whole vision
turn to darkness and his very feet give way." ⁶

The vision turned to darkness, the struggle upward for the light, in the 'buried' rooms of the dark house ... such is the psychology, such the parable, such the 'manifest Analogy', of Edwin Arlington Robinson's poetry.

NOTES

- 1 "The Jolly Corner", In the Cage & Other Tales, Edited with an Introduction by Morton Dauwen Zabel (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958), 328.
- 2 All quotations from Robinson's poetry have been taken from Collected Poems (New York, Macmillan, 1952 - Ninth Printing) and page references are indicated in brackets immediately following quotation.
- 3 In the Cage & Other Tales, p.p. 318-19.
- 4 Jung, Carl, G., The Integration of the Personality, tr. by Stanley Dell (London, Kegan Paul, 1948), 289.
- 5 In the Cage & Other Tales, p. 333.
- 6 Ibid, p. 344.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION : THE POET, THE SCALPEL

our most perceptive minds have distinguished themselves from our popular spokesmen by concentrating upon the dark other half of the situation, and their distinctive attitude has been introspection, dissent, or irony.

- HARRY LEVIN,

The Power of Blackness

There can be no doubt that from the beginning of the nineteenth century ... man has given a more and more prominent place to the psyche, his increasing attentiveness to it being the measure of its growing attraction for him.

- C.G.JUNG

The scalpel, the microscope, and the split-atom are symbols of a tendency of the modern age. The war-head, the machine, and the multi-storey building are symbols of a contradictory yet complementary tendency. Science has done much to construct projections of the basic dualities in nature and man and to render palpable forms that embody the introversion-extroversion structure of the human organism. Twentieth-century science is part of a general historical process in the shifting of frontiers.

United States society, renowned in the modern world for its extroverted endeavours, has a cultural past in which the dynamic extension of the frontier without has not been to the neglect of

curiosity and conviction concerning the extension of the frontier within. The great within, the psychic world of man, sanctified the individual rights of man as expressions of his just desires and thereby provided the pattern for the best-possible 'great without'. There was disseminated an optimistic belief in man, which rested on the premise that life-experience was, ideally, the synthesis of human endeavour in accord with the results of intellectual inquiry. Such a view conceived American man as the renascent, archetypal Adam and the self-autonomous artefact of destiny. The praises of the vibrant, extroverted Adam were sung by Walt Whitman. Eve, big-hipped and bountiful, was glorified. America, idealised according to the extroversion tendency, was the Eden without. It was an unconscious counterfoil to the puritanical Eden within, which it regarded as a living inhumation of the élan vital conducted at the behest of the introversion tendency. 'Endeavour' charted and exploited the body at the expense of introspection.

In the opposite view of hereditary Puritanism, introspection explored the mind and exploited the soul at the expense of worldly endeavour, and perpetuated the myth of the Fall. Calvinistic exacerbations, on the one hand, and vitally original reflection, on the other, contributed to the compendium of New World ratiocination and the evolution of a pioneer consciousness that rooted man's place in the Scheme. Perceptive minds recognized that in the psychological and moral realm of man, between the farceur's paroxysm and the financier's monomania, between the planetary

demons and the moral arrangement, was a subliminal world of Idea and Reality to be thought about and intuited; and they made introspective bids to sort out the incongruous in conduct and justice and to find values for the individual being. In the introversion of this endeavour Nathaniel Hawthorne reaped his harvest.

The opposite life tendencies (forces that manipulate the body machine and the soul-searching scalpel respectively) have exercised a profound influence upon American literature. Vocalists like Carl Sandburg are the heirs of Whitman and artists like Edwin Arlington Robinson are the heirs of Hawthorne. Only in the most comprehensive classic of American literature, Herman Melville's Moby Dick, is the divergence of proliferation arrested and the introversion-extroversion structure supremely envisaged. One of the exasperations of American criticism has been the attempt to find Melville an heir-apparent. But the war, not necessarily dialectical, of expression and introspection goes on as it always will, and poets like Hart Crane will commit suicide as they always do.

Undeceived minds, like that of Robinson, perceived that between the mythical antipodes of 'without' and 'within' were many ignorant and repressive darkneses in which, too often, extroversion resulted in self-aggrandizement, introversion in self-centredness, and the Edenic fruits blighted. The fatally extravagant, extroverted (hence uncharacteristic) verse of Robinson's "Dionysus in Doubt" spits out such sentiments in a diatribe against the "ultimate uniformity" of a brave new world

under which, aided by the "machine", "all are niched and ticketed and all are standardized and unexceptional" (p.366) and "the poor cringing self" is "disowned". The poem, an attack on prohibition legislation that conspired "to wring the neck of nature" (p.362), describes the "nation" as "hasty" and "inflexible". In the great without the American Adam experiences "millennial ecstasies Of much too much at once" (p.360), and in the great within his blind unconscious enthrones "idolatries" while he is

"Perniciously at prayer

For consummation and a furtherance

Of his benevolent ingrained repression ... " (p.363)

At such times the race, in its New World Eden, is like an immature extrovert band of "Happy ... children."

"Happy as children eating worm-ripe fruit

Praising the obvious for the absolute,

They see an end of that which has no end

Of their devising ... " (p.363)

A "less pleasant serpent" has stolen their manhood and their womanhood.

The introspective poet, whose appreciation of mass psychology is generally without illusions and whose analytical interests are primarily concerned with individual psychology, rarely indulges in the muscular mood of "Dionysus in Doubt", except to occasionally to elevate such mood symbolically and to universalise his comment poetically as Robinson succeeded in doing in Marlin. A poet of Robinson's talents, therefore, might have been well advised to

leave unversified his exercise in propagandist extroversion and to remain content to voice his comment privately, as he did in a letter to Witter Bynner:

"I am pretty well satisfied that free verse, prohibition, and moving pictures are a triumvirate from hell, armed with the devil's instructions to abolish civilization - which, by the way, has not yet existed, and cannot exist until the human brain undergoes many changes. A brain, for example, that is 100% American cannot in the nature of things
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have many percent left over".

Any expression of the extroversion tendency which involved profligate or uncivilized psychic expenditure, idolatry of a mass ideal, or celebration of the state, provided no canons for a New England individualist whose evident preoccupations - universal spiritual and aesthetic problems - transcended group interests; whose introspective music sought to simulate 'the pulse, the divine heart of man' (p.85); and whose mythology retained in psychological context remnants of the Puritan demonology. The private lives that make up the group, and its environmental victims, presented problems in introversion of sufficient magnitude to engage the attention of such a poet. Thus, even a poetic exception like "Dionysus in Doubt" included the Robinsonian belief that the "self", for which there "is no cure", is at the core of human experience and values. With conscience on one side and an incubus on the

other, the self has a moral responsibility to invest its ego with dignity and self-esteem. Unlike Robinson Jeffers who, employing incest as a symbol of the curse of introversion, advocated a breaking away from humanity, Robinson adhered to his implacable resolve to synthesise the psychological elements of life into the spiritual course of existence.

In place of extroversion E.A. Robinson emulates the objective attitude. This objectivity occasionally directs him away from his introspective province and reminds him that idealism is not necessarily a private thing nor a solely human prerogative. The racial force that gives rise to the American dream is referred to, for example, in an uncharacteristic avowal of the collective unconscious when, as late as 1934, he wrote: "There is a lot of untried resource and vitality in this country that will require a lot of smothering before we hear its death-squeak." ² What is less uncharacteristic is his consciousness of the 'smothering' repressive principle, and the tinge of Emersonian idealism that interested him then as it had thirty-two years earlier when, in Captain Craig, he described the American "dream"

"Wherein we catch, like a bacchanale through thunder,
The chanting of the new Eumenides,
Implacable, renascent, farcical,
Triumphant and American." (p.143)

Also exceptional is his adulation of the modern culture here in such poems as "The Master" and "The Revealer", although historical studies of the nature of "An Island" and "John Brown", which are important as psychological analyses of character, are more common.

Lincoln in "The Master" and Roosevelt in "The Revealer" are extolled as embodiments of man's higher consciousness. They are Titans and archetypes of the collective wisdom of the ages. Thus, Lincoln, whose face 'was never young' nor 'wholly ... old', 'Was elemental when he died, As he was ancient at his birth' (p.313); and Roosevelt 'Is ... the world's accredited Revealer of what we have done.' (p.360) In contrast with the impercipient majority 'Who read the surface for the soul' they are 'the far-seeing ones' (p.360); and the poet, employing irony, measures the distressing gulf between their dissenting introspections and the masses' jeering complacency.

It is not altogether surprising, then, that perhaps Robinson's nearest synthesis of action and reflection, in the large view, is envisaged in unconscious nature instead of human society. The microcosmic dream permeates the beauty of one of the poet's most perfect sonnets, "The Sheaves", in which the impersonal ideal is expressed in nature's sublimed harmony of extroversion and introversion:

'Like nothing that was ever bought or sold
It waited there, the body and the mind;
And with a mighty meaning of a kind
That tells the more the more it is not told.' (p.371)

The poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson provides an exposition and critique of American, specifically New England, introversion, and his modus operandi is mainly a revelation of life and man in the workings of the introspective mind. He maintains a rigid

objectivity towards his subject matter, even when drawing upon, or projecting, his personal introspections, and this is particularly evident in his numerous analytical studies of other people's introspections. Three of his most significant contributions to poetry are his restoration of the art of characterisation, his anticipation of the modern exploration of the psyche, and his psychological method of revealing the inner thoughts and emotions of his diverse characters. His "method is", according to Harriet Monroe, "akin to that of the psychoanalyst who encourages confessional monologue, or uses dialogue, as a probe to strike through the³ poison of lies and appearances and reveal the truth."

Introspection is the poet's scalpel-like means of probing the human darkness as one critic suggests when he says that Robinson's "gift ... is less for creation than for dissection; he does not embody or make men so much as take them apart. He is the imaginative insight or understanding that probes and anatomizes."⁴ Whereas this estimate may apply to many of the poet's case-histories, especially in the longer poems, it nevertheless undervalues some of his best character sketches in which original creation is predominant and psychological vivisection suggestive and subliminal rather than forced or fixed. In many of the lyrics that describe states of mind or personal affairs, or in the straight-out portraits, or in the monologues and dialogues that reveal human relationships, the psychological realism of the poems is often sufficiently profound to evoke an imaginative understanding of psychic processes without leaving a predominant impression of psychic iconoclasm. Even when

the subject of a poem is psychic iconoclasm, as in certain studies of neurotic despair such as "Luke Havergal", "Reuben Bright", "The Mill", and "The Whip", the poem need not forsake artistic wholeness nor need the impression of psychic reality disintegrate. There is a progression of action in such poems which circumscribes the prevailing psychic experience of each character. In the most successful of the shorter poems the scalpel is generally invisible.

The enigmatic "Luke Havergal", which Allen Tate described⁵ as "one of the great lyrics of modern times", is a modus of modern man's attentiveness to the psyche and an early example of Robinson's creation of his introspective method. His method achieves here the symbolic evocation of two psychological conditions : firstly, the specification of Havergal's unconscious motivations as voices impinging upon the conscious mind; secondly, the representation of the illusion of a triplex condition of consciousness in which the psyche embraces and confuses subliminal experience, sense impressions of the external world, and notions of the after-life. The energy of the soul's longing, which drives the heavily pulsing lines, is an expression of the 'crimson', 'fiery', erotic motive that rifts the darkness of heart and mind. The introverted mind, and not the supernatural, provides the poem's total frame of reference. Each voice rises up introspectively from the depths of the psyche and not out of a physical grave or thin air. The method enables the poet to write from within his subject and to exploit to illusion point the spacial - time dimensions of the great without by projecting into it phantasies of the great within.

"The Dark House" is another example of the intense introspective nature of Robinson's symbolic studies and is a skeletal prototype of a characteristic exploration of psychological depth. The introspections have a double significance because they indicate not only what is passing through the mind of the person who describes the House but also, as he himself is an ex-prisoner of the House's Demon, what his friend inside is experiencing. The House, darkness, Demon and music symbolism make it plain that the poem is a psychological parable in which the symbols suggest, respectively, the psyche or mind; the neurotic supremacy of the unconscious; the imprisoning obsession; and freedom from neurosis through rebirth, or 'individuation'. The psychological and the therapeutic sensibility of the theme is appreciated more readily by comparison with a product of aesthete sensibility - Oscar Wilde's "The Harlot's House" - which employs the same group of symbols to present a romantic theme. Robinson's poem is a modern examination (introspection) of original, psychic experience, whereas Wilde's poem is a decadent impression (restriction) of conventional, romantic experience. "The Harlot's House" has a simple narrative structure that supports action to the exclusion of reflection; the lover who is forsaken for 'the house of lust' describes its figures and their activities purely from the point of view ^{of} an antithetical uninitiate and grieved outsider. His experience is not ^{one} of soul-searching but of romantic deprivation, and his awareness ^{is} of grotesque ^{es} images rather than of psychological possibilities. The symbols in Wilde's poem, being primarily dedicated to the evocation

of pure sensations of movement and tone, produce entirely different effects from Robinson's. The implicit horror and anguish of the 'I' in "The Harlot's House" is a romantic cliché, as indeed is his situation, but that of the prisoner in "The Dark House" is a psychological truism. Wilde's erotic demon ('A phantom lover'), the 'demon lover' of Romantic poetry, recalls the conventional (but in his case, characteristically inverted) succubus. His figures are metaphorical 'shadows' which 'raced across the blind' and whose prime relevance is to sensation. The Robinson 'I', however, not only observes the shadow's contorted mental movements, but postulates the dilemma of the shadow-trapped ego:

'I see the shadow glide,

Back and forth, of one denied

Power to find himself outside.' (p.43)

Having undergone the same psychic experience, he knows what is is to escape the 'web' and appreciates that the power of the liberating 'music' - which, rising from the soul's depths, is 'More than reason, more than dreams' (p.44) - can bring to a man 'Singing life' and resurrect him from living death:

'And my friend, again outside,

Will be living, having died.' (p.45)

"The Dark House", a synthesis of introspection, is an allegory of the unconscious.

"Miniver Cheevy" demonstrates that Robinson's analysis of introversion, often characterised by grimness, pathos, and bitter wrong, is not always unalleviated by comedy. Miniver is a prototype

introvert, and a humorous example of the obsessive length to which impossible wish-fulfilment may lead; fixated to an idealised past,

'Miniver thought, and thought, and thought,

And thought about it.' (p.348)

E.A. Robinson had published four important books of poetry, including many of the best of his shorter pieces and the first psychological narrative written in modern English (Captain Craig, 1902), before American cultural consciousness could comprehend the significance of his analysis of introversion or fully appreciate the psychological subtleties impregnated in his poetic introspections. He was contemporary before the majority of his age, and, undoubtedly, the first significant modern American poet.

During the upheavals of the Great War the first real signs of a new coalescence between extroversion and introversion became apparent. The introspective mood of Europe, with which Robinson had had intellectual contact for more than twenty years, began to disturb American complacency, and it was not long before many of the old assumptions of convenience began to totter. Self-investigation and a revolutionary interest in the psyche characterised the new consciousness. Mark Sullivan, in his cultural history Our Times, The United States 1900-1925, has suggested that Freudian psychology had exercised considerable influence by 1914 and provided "The largest single group of new ideas, and the ones that were most fundamental in the changes they wrought ..."⁶ The real impact of Freudianism, as Frederick J. Hoffman has established, was felt during the post-war decades. He described the period as one "of introspection

of seeking within the human mind for solutions of problems which in another age might have been judged externally." ⁷ Grace

Adams comments on the co-proliferation of the great without and the great within when she writes: "The ten years immediately following the close of the World War may best be remembered as the Decade of the Dollar. But they might also be appropriately recalled as the Period of the Psyche." ⁸

The predominant psychological quality of Robinson's work preceded and accompanied the psychological age. While his early poetry was an anticipatory comment about ingrained tendencies that were destined to recrudescence in the modern consciousness, his tortuously introspective poetry of the twenties and thirties was mainly devoted to a detailed analysis of contemporary introversion with a not infrequent diagnosis of materialistic ebullience. Perhaps the problems of the modern consciousness had emerged in such a complicated fashion, perhaps the moral crisis, the vacuum in traditional values, had occasioned such labyrinthine complexities of introspection, that therein lay the reason why Robinson found himself generally no longer able to write short poems and lyrics. His moral and psychological awareness of the complex age confronted him with a technical difficulty which he never completely surmounted. The problems of sensibility were immense and the only consistent technical approximation to them that he was able to find lay in his variations of the long, blank verse narrative - variations which occasionally fell perilously close to compromise with the novel or with convoluted debate.

It would seem logical to commence a study of the poetry of E.A. Robinson with an examination of his introspective and psychological approach to humanity in relation to the following categories: (1) the poet's life and personal experiences ; (2) the poet's Puritan, New England environment with its traditional contemplation of self ; (3) the introspective tradition in European and American literature, and its compatibility with the modern age ; (4) the poet's 'master faculty' - psychological intuition - and probing method, as revealed by his exploration of the psyche and the scope of his psychological themes, in the shorter poems.

THE POET AND EXPERIENCE

(1)

Observers of Robinson the man have unfailingly acknowledged his acute reticence and noted that he lived in an inner reality wherein the analytical poet brooded, alone, over his poetic lucubrations concerning what went on in the dark house of man. Employing the Robinsonian symbol, Carl Van Doren writes:

"I always thought of him as a great poet who happened to occupy a house of flesh and blood in which he lived secretly ... making his secret poems ... Talking to him, you heard no actual words that gave away his secret. But now and then you would think you got a glimpse, as through a window, of the man he was, and then you knew he was a poet, and great." 9

The poet's unworldly life, which was from the start an incubation of sensitivity, intellectuality, and a stoic realisation of failure and isolation, provided him with the credentials to survey the inner topographies of man and with the eventual burning truth that, whatever the cost and disappointment and irony, the great within was not the inferior field of human endeavour. Thus, he eventually won his battle against formative feelings of inferiority in face of the gregarious confidence of the great without. While Richard Corys continued to put bullets through their heads, the poet exorcised his demon.

Robinson's reticent nature directed him into the realm of thought and private emotion, so that his prime concern became the psychic world and its values rather than the overt world and its valours, the tragedy of introversion and frustration rather than of extroversion and heroism. The poet's appeal is not sensationistic. In the Arthurian trilogy he did not 'show' and document a war-stricken, tottering civilization, nor film its death-throes, in the crude tradition of mythical extroversion; he symbolised the fall in powerful images, analysed the psychology of disintegration, and gave priority to the complex personal with its drama of Eros and soul conflict.

The priority of the psychological over the sociological in relation to war as the symbol of extroversion provides the theme of a short poem entitled "The Field of Glory". The poet's treatment of the theme reflects his psychoanalytical nature and his anti-materialistic belief. He turns his attention away from

the action of war to the frustration of "a poor devil" (Levi) who wanted to go to war, and illustrates the futility of the extrovert dream in its misalliance of motive and meaning. Levi is a study in the psychology of the misfit whose weakness leaves him a prey to false values without and to psychic impotence, mother-domination, within. He is a semi-neurotic victim of the web of extroversion and materialism. "If you tried to find any kind of hero in Levi", the poet wrote Hermann Hagedorn, "I don't wonder that you didn't succeed in caring much for him. He is just a poor devil, totally miscast, and with not much in his head anyway. The world is peppered with his kind ..." ¹⁰ The poet was not one of them.

(11)

The main facts in the life of Edwin Arlington Robinson are as follows:-

The poet was born to parents of old New England stock at Head Tide, Maine, on December 22, 1869. He had two elder brothers, Horace Dean and Herman. In September, 1870 the family moved to Gardiner, Maine, where the poet's father, already a competent businessman, became a prominent citizen as bank director, councilman, and alderman. Edwin Robinson grew up in Gardiner and graduated from its high school in June, 1888. He remained at home until 1891 and, although he undertook a few odd jobs, found himself totally unfitted for a practical life. He was dedicated to literature and wrote verses. In September, 1891, he enrolled as a special student

at Harvard where he remained until June, 1893. But he was forced to return home before the end of his first year because of his father's ailing health. His father died in July, 1892.

Robinson lived at home from 1893 to 1897, and pursued a variety of literary activities. His mother died in 1896 at a time when family fortunes were deteriorating; when Dean and Herman, who had shown outstanding promise in medicine and business respectively, were becoming known to the world as 'failures'. From January to June, 1899, Robinson was employed in the administration office at Harvard.

It was a dark time: family and fortune were coming to nought. Dean died a victim of narcotics and alcohol three months before the birth of the new century. The poet returned to New York where, for the next few years, he was subject to intermittent suffering and hardship and the ambiguous stimulus of cathartic and indelible experiences. From the autumn of 1903 until August of 1904 he worked in a New York subway then under construction. A friend found him temporary employment in a Boston store from January to May, 1905. Following this he was given a sinecure in the New York Customs by Theodore Roosevelt, who greatly admired The Children of The Night. He was forced to resign this position in June, 1909. Shortly prior to this Herman, weakened by business misfortune and alcohol, had died of tuberculosis in a public ward of the Boston City Hospital.

From July to October, 1910, the poet resided in Chocorua, New Hampshire; and from July to September of the following year

lived at the MacDowell Colony for artists at Peterborough, where he spent the summer months from then on and did most of his creative writing. The remainder of his time was spent in New York, apart from regular stays at Boston and isolated holidays. Except for a visit to England in 1923 he didn't stray from his native New England.

He won the Pulitzer Prize on three occasions, and died as a result of cancer on April 5, 1935.

(111)

The temper of Robinson's life and character was undoubtedly introspective and conducive to psychological speculation. His mentation was moulded by a number of factors including : understanding of the innate self (heredity) ; temperament characterised by reticence (personality) ; intellectual assimilation of human experience (Weltanschauung) ; psychology motivated by significant *immediate experiences* traumas and epiphanies (environment).

"I guess ... I was born with my skin inside out", he once remarked momentarily!" Robinson was highly conscious of an innate predilection for the contemplative life and an equally innate inability to find a niche in the practical life. His private assessments inevitably returned to his "dream " of "writing" which had been with him since he "was old enough to lay a plan for an
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air castle." Poetry was his credo : "I can't do anything else
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but write poetry and perhaps I can't do even that, but I'm going to try". "There was nothing else I could do", he said, "and I

had to justify my existence." ¹⁴ Material for poems was fished out of 'The black and awful chaos of the night' (p.94) and "the squirming sea of language" ¹⁵ to be meticulously moulded into a form that would emit 'light'. Exploration of the subconscious, and observations of man, provided the main canons for a poet who was an "incorrigible fisher of words" that were "smooth and shining and subtle" and for an art which demanded "patience and many rejections." ¹⁶

Poet friends such as Robert Frost, Hermann Hagedorn, Amy Lowell, and John Drinkwater assessed the singular relevance of temperamental reticence in Robinson's work; as the English poet expressed it, "His life and manner have just that incisive reticence that is so characteristic of his poetry." ¹⁷ This reticence is evident in the poet's oblique, inferential method, which is based upon recognition of subliminal reality, the psychological unknown, the privacy of the inner world, the often undetected workings of conscience and primal nature, and vagaries of facts, memory and time. The method reveals a reticence that conceals an unpuritanical desire not to prejudge human substance and action, and often achieved that degree of sophistication whereby technique and form express perception and theme. This methodic reticence occasionally protected the author from embarrassingly direct and disturbing revelations. The superficial melodrama in Avon's Harvest, for example, is, paradoxically, a sign of the reticent sensibility, and not of gothic extravagance: the melodrama disguises and censoriously distorts unrefined depth experience, which is not

explicated but semi-consciously inferred, in an attempt to achieve the refinement of art. The same is true of certain of the writings of Henry James. In view of modern man's discovery of many uncomplimentary facts about the secret self, his epics of introspection - such as the Amaranth of Robinson, the Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer of Conrad, and The Turn of the Screw of James - challenge the technical problem of revealing that self without sacrificing artistic integrity, meaning, and literary taste. A chimera of refinement and a convoluted style, evident in Robinson's and James' work, was often employed as a device - a veiled medium - to invoke the more than man.

Amy Lowell described the arcamm of Robinsonian reticence as follows:

"He began to see life with a touch of irony because it was not his life. His life was nowhere, he withdrew mentally within himself; he withdrew more and more, but he would not compromise ... it was one continuous fight between himself and himself, between the old Puritan atavism and the new, free spirit. Every poem which Mr. Robinson writes is his dual self personified."

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Roman Bartholow, of the longer poems, "The Book of Annadale" of the medium-length poems, and "Llewellyn and the Tree", of the lyrics, typify aspects of the 'fight' in which reticence-provoked inhibitions of a spiritual and sexual nature are made less tenuous, more conscious, and more overt until the 'spirit' is freed from a tyrannous or superfluous past - albeit to suffer new tyrannies in a future that may be 'a grave without a name' and 'far off as a moral'. (p.55)

The poet's reticence affected a steadfast refusal to commit himself about his poetry, apart from a few scattered and general comments; he believed that "poets should write" poetry "and not talk about it".¹⁹ He left it to the critic to pore over his map of the psyche and to divine the ramifications of his psychological researches.

Robinson's Weltanschauung is a psychoanalytical ideal of healthy subconscious vitality within a cosmos of rational order, combined with a spiritual faith in the purpose of the Unknowable. Among the complex facts of psychology, which Robinson described as "the great shuffle of transmitted characteristics, traits, abilities, aptitudes", he declared that a man should fix "on something definite",²⁰ come to terms with his "Inner Fire" and follow "where it leads." Experience of life taught him that his own "light" had always kept him going; it was "burning pretty low" at times, "but it never went out".²¹

Robinson was perceptive of human incongruity and duality, of the tension between illusion and reality, 'without' and 'within', consciousness and soul-obscurity; of what one critic has described as "the measureless discrepancy between life experienced and life desired "in which "chilling reason and warning faith" are "each impotent to conquer wholly" or "surrender completely".²² His own painful experiences taught him, as he explained to Mason, that "The great art of life is to suffer without worrying".²³ 'Before we see' says St. Paul in "The Three Taverns",

'Meanwhile we suffer; and I come to you

At last, through many storms and through much night.' (p.466)

Sincerity in human relations and discipline in imagination coalesced in the unflinching honesty of his art, which has been widely regarded as "the result of long and by no means happy brooding over the fundamental perplexities of a life wherein most good things are fragile and soon gone." ²⁴ "It's a great and ²⁵ terrible world", the poet wrote Hagedorn. Therein is the core of the Robinsonian belief that life is worthwhile because it all must mean something and must come to something. Life taps a cosmic unconscious; therefore individual human life must tap its personal-collective unconscious to find a 'light'. It was not surprising that the intimacies of the lonely poet's restricted friendships were like gleams in the blackness. During the first, dark, New York days he observed the example of his friend, George Burnham. The poet's biographer reports:

"Burnham reached into the recesses where Robinson was trying to come to terms with forces which had dealt harshly with them both ... Burnham had achieved an Oriental tolerance illuminated by an Occidental sense of humor and helped Robinson cut the last of the hawsers that bound his spirit to "the crumbled wharves" of accepted theology.

"The tap-root of the subconscious goes down to ²⁶ God", he would say."

The poet learned that, no matter what anxiety he felt in the face of personal obscurity, he could feel consistently confident in the universal Obscure. "Isn't the mystery and vitality and

energy of the whole thing enough to give interest and confidence?"
 he assured Mason. ²⁷ The semi-tragic fate of individual man,
 his 'zugrunde gehen', is conceived against the elemental majesty
 of ultimate meaning.

(iv)

The poet's life mirrors a sensitive nature and a sense of individual difference each of which stimulated a practical and imaginative interest in psychology. The very limitations of that life, in relation to the great without and the 'élan vital' of sexuality, encouraged a genuine desire to understand the secretive springs of experience, provided him with the objectivity of the scientific observer, and armed him, as it were, with a psychic divining rod. A commentator rather than a participator, he revealed the courage of conviction in displaying sympathy and tolerance and in disparaging morbidity, cynicism and bitterness.

Numerous factors contributed to the poet's sense of individual difference. The trauma of birth and the fact of being born to old parents may have exercised a persistent personality influence. Nidus and rebirth themes are important in his poetry. Horror and duplicity attend the Maine lake drama of birth and death in Avon's Harvest. Piteousness, irony, and despair are revealed in the Levi-type (representing the failure of the extroversion impulse), who 'Reborn may be as great as any' (p.232); or in the Norcross-type (representing the failure of the introversion impulse), who cleaved to "An old house full of ghosts of ancestors" (p.500); whose "tethered range Was only a small desert" (p.507); and who

"knew there was a region all around him

That lay outside man's havoc and affairs,

And yet was not all hostile to their tumult ... " (p.506)

"Tasker Norcross" refers to "the slow tragedies of haunted men" (p.500) wherein imperfect birth and the sense of difference have contributed to their destiny. The 'small satanic sort of kink' is believed to be, in some men and women, the result of preconditioned process that environment is powerless to change. As Neff points out, ²⁸ Robinson was grappling early in his career with "the problem of individual responsibility for failure." The critic observes that the poet, attracted to the "grim philosophy" of Omar Khayyam, writes to a friend about "the luckless pots" the Creator "marred in making". Robinson sensed in many 'a soul half done'. Clavering, who fails 'To bring his wounded vessel home', 'played ... a flawed instrument That fell while it was being made' (p.333); Larkamie's 'last word' contains the sentiment that

"Some creatures are born fortunate, and some

Are born to be found out and overcome, -

Born to be slaves, to let the rest go free;" (p.p.191-2)

"The Valley of the Shadow" includes these for whom 'the blasting obligations of ... birth' were 'Unrelieved', as well as 'the unborn'; the woman in "Another Dark Lady" is branded with evil; the despicable multitude observes (in "Vain Gratuities") that a woman's husband was unsurpassed in ugliness and grimness 'In the eyes of ... women' and that it was 'No wonder that she kept her figure slim' (p.576) and comments (in "The Rat") upon

'The inscrutable profusion of the Lord

Who shaped as one of us a thing so mean -

Who made him human when he might have been

A rat ... '

(p.512)

Robinson, himself tormented by a defect in one ear, was highly sensitive to the psychological effects of physical infirmity occasioned by birth or circumstance. Norcross, like Umphraville in Roman Bartholow, was marred by the need of "a more sufficient face"; and the unlovely women who mourned, 'not for love', for the former, as well as the self-imposed celibate hermitage of the latter, are hints of physically determined sexual repression. The ambiguous fruits of the Tree of Knowledge were autochthonously transmitted. The "infirmity" of Norcross, who was "cursed with such invidious insight" (p.505), is related to "his knowledge" that "was death" in contrast, as it is suggested, to that of other "men":

"God, you see,

Being sorry for them in their fashioning,

Indemnified them with a quaint esteem

Of self, and with illusions long as life." (p.503)

(The poet's psychology did not altogether dispose of "illusions" that for some were happily homeostatic.) For Umphraville, however, the fruit is more beneficial : academic learning is a sublimation and a mental necessity. Again, another type, for whom instinctual happiness was a basic need, is described in "Llewellyn and the Tree". Llewellyn forsook the wife that goaded 'him for what God left out'

and 'fled' with 'The Scarlet One ... coral, rouge, and all.' (p.52)

'He may among the millions here

Be one; or he may, quite as well,

Be gone to find again the Tree

Of Knowledge, out of which he fell.

He may be near us, dreaming yet

Of unrepented rouge and coral;

Or in a grave without a name

May be as far off as a moral.' (p.p.54-5)

For introspective, apperceptive, philosophical, intelligent minds the dream may be a vision of the child archetype, as it is for Captain Graig; or the not-so-distant 'tower' of 'rebirth', as it is for Matthias.

The poet's personal feelings of difference and isolation developed during the inferiority-forming years of an excessively shy childhood, and this factor is probably not unrelated to the frequency of the love-frustration theme in his work. His sister-in-law recalls: "at the age of eight or ten he had realized that he was different from the boys who liked only athletics and playing ball, and sometimes wished he had not been born".²⁹ But he developed a compensating speculative frame of mind and a sense of humour that were the fruits of maturing analytical habits. One of his early teachers remembered him as "a highly sensitive child, looking at the world objectively, for the most part, and quick to observe the humor in everything."³⁰ In his twenty-fourth year the poet wrote a letter to Smith (whose appreciation of "the natural variance of human nature" he saluted) in which he analysed "the existence of

several elements or characteristics in" his "make-up".

His introspection discerned ingrained, disadvantageous qualities including a predilection for dreaming, an outgrown pessimism, a critical attitude to the world, and a personal lack of self-confidence.

Robinson's boyhood indicates that, at home, he sometimes suffered from an acute sense of impatience and was disposed to compare himself unfavourably with his talented brothers. Unable to mix with the crowd, motivated by a shy fear of the opposite sex, he seems to have been an isolated school-fellow whose social happiness was provided by a select circle of friends. From his schooldays until the end of his life, however, the poet's friendships provided excellent material for psychological analysis, while the individual sense of difference was maintained as a result not only of his choice of career but of the fringe of eccentricity that he saw about him.

An early relationship of psychological interest was the poet's friendship with Dr. Alanson Schuman, the Gardiner homeopath. Hagedorn records that Robinson had become the doctor's close friend by 1833-39, and describes Schuman as follows :

"an odd creature, as lonely as his young neighbor;
an adequate physician, ruined by poetry; a social
being, alienated from his fellows not only by his
tastes but by a psychic disturbance which his
generation could gossip about but could not understand.
His crotchety old mother, who had done her part in

the break-up of the projected marriage almost
 at the altar ten years before, ruled him with
 the proverbial rod of iron. They fought like
 cats when they were together and were unhappy
 out of each other's sight."
 32

This friendship and his close relationship with his brother-physician, whose talents would have been suitably employed in research, most probably influenced his poetic interest in medicine and medical psychology. Doctors in Robinson's poetry include Malory (a possible projection of Dean Robinson), ^{the} microbiologist in The Glory of the Nightingales; the physician who concludes Avon's Harvest with a psychological diagnosis; Doctor Styx in "the wrong world" of Amaranth, a Schuman prototype who may be numbered among the 'sick physicians' of the 'Valley of the Shadow'; the speaker in "How Annadale Went Out" who justifies euthanasia; Doctor Quick who, in Talifer, sets about to do a successful psychoanalytical job of harmoniously re-arranging mismanaged love relationships; and several amateur clinical psychologists of whom Penn-Raven in Roman Bartholow is the most obvious example. The poet employs a clinical vocabulary and symbolism in some of his diagnoses of psychological states and introspections. Quick informs Althea that he is "at work on a prognosis" of Talifer's ill-made marriage which "No pills or tinctures ... Will cure." (p.1256) The doctor confesses his psycho-therapeutic attitude in the remark "I should have been a priest"; and attributes psychic significance to the laws of Life, which he relates to the unconscious ("the scrap-hea

repression, anxiety, neurosis ("a cold prison"), and self-comprehension: these energies

"are outside

The kingdom of our wits, and frequently
 Are inconsiderate of our best mistakes.
 They wake us up and make us hate our^Rselves
 Till we cease hating them. Sometimes we can't;
 And we are for the scrap-heap, to be wasted.
 We dread the sound of our deliverers,
 And shut them out, because we like to starve;
 Or say because we cannot face ourselves
 In a true looking-glass. Few of us can;
 But that won't save our neighbors, who are shaken
 Out of a silly dream that won't come back
 To punish them again. They are awake
 Today in a cold prison, which has a door
 That has no bolt." (p.1257)

Robinson's relationship with his family was presumably a factor that contributed to the poet's self-isolation. He felt stifled by his father, especially during the parent's exhausting progress towards death, although the experience was not without psychological interest. During this time (shortly before the Harvard days) certain biographical details indicate the influence of the poet's home life in vouchsafing, instead of changing, his introspective, reticent, and celibate nature. That nature affirmed itself during the stimulating friendship with Schuman, at a time when the young man was "exploring the convolutions of character and personality,

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brooding over motives ...", and became firmly entrenched as a result of uneventful love experience of the fair sex's regard for him as "different", and of his dedication to poetry at the

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expense of marriage. Moreover, with Dean and his father disintegrating and himself tortured by an infected ear, Robinson became more and more shut in by personal suffering and an acute sense of responsibility. His mother signified suffering that was unsharable and love that was unattainable - themes which colour a large percentage of his poems. Hagedorn writes:

"His mother and he were as responsive to each other as two wires drawn to the same pitch, and as inexpressive as they were responsive. Both suffering, there was something New England in them which decreed that they must not share their sufferings; and their grief propagated itself like a cry in a chasm ... "

It is not surprising, therefore, that some of Robinson's most memorable lyrics - for example, "The Gift of God", "For a Dead Lady", "The Poor Relation", "The Voice of Age" - celebrate the mother image. "The Gift of God" is a penetrating study of a mother's love for a son whose worth she sublimates. It concludes with a beautiful projection of the Oedipal vision (as much the author's as his character's) that requires neither comment nor elucidation:

'His fame, though vague, will not be small,
As upward through her dream he fares,
Half clouded with a crimson fall
Of roses thrown on marble stairs'. (p.p.7-8)

In the other three poems, respectively, the 'image' is
'condensed' in relation to death and the defeat of beauty:

'The breast where roses could not live

Has done with rising and with falling'. (p.355)

to the past, loneliness, warmth of spirit (and the defeat of beauty):

'Her truant from a tomb of years -

Her power of youth so early taken.' (p.46)

to 'age allayed with loveliness' and parental admonition:

'If only people were more wise,

And grown-up children used their eyes'. (p.43)

Returning to the biographical account, it is noticeable that the personal basis of other themes of isolation - frustrated brotherhood and sexual loneliness - probably had their origin in Gardiner's experiences. Relevant to the first is Hagedorn's observation that "The friends who had been his solace in his boyhood had gone away, or withdrawn from him ..."³⁶ Not to be confused with the most inclusive theme of the psychological inadequacy of man's understanding of man, of which it is an aspect, the theme of frustrated brotherhood is evident in the long poems (in Avon's Harvest it is positively morbid and paranoid) and in such short poems as "Fleming Helphenstine", "Cassandra", "A Song at Shannon's", "Reunion", "Afterthoughts", "The Wandering Jew", and "Tasker Norcross". It illustrates the primacy of the unconscious will in certain circumstances. Estrangement is made more significant through the ironic contrast between jovial cordiality, and 'strained' silence that results in the 'confused' and 'amazed' need to escape (p.90).

Contact is abruptly and irredeemably severed, as in death.

Neither met

The other's eyes again or said a word.

Each to his own loneliness or to his kind,

Went his own way, and with his own regret,

Not knowing what the other may have heard." (p.509)

In "Alma Mater", "Why He Was There", "The Corridor", and, to a lesser extent, "But For The Grace Of God", however, the theme is entirely introverted and introjected to reveal the psyche itself regarding itself. These poems reflect the author's introspective prowess and natural reticence, as well as his dark soul; and they are illuminated by Hagedorn's report of a personal episode (of the early New York days) which indicates paranoid and masochistic tendencies, as well as frustrated brotherhood.

"He was acutely impressionable. "Do you know?"

he said to Torrence one day, "one of the most terrible things is to walk alone and feel that you are receiving deadly wounds."

"What do you mean?"

"It is to go along the street and glance into the eyes of passers-by and catch a glimpse of recognition, and
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know that you will never see them again."

So strong was the unconscious guilt of conscious alienation that in "En Passant" a man is saved from certain death by an act of sociability. The theme of alienation, finally, is not unconnected with Robinson's poetic and private ambition to help brighten "the way for a few groping wanderers ..."

"Robinson was desperately lonely"³⁹ in the dark house of dying in Gardiner, and his loneliness was apparently not unconnected with sexual matters as he sensed that his few real friends were about to dissolve forever in 'love's obliteration of the crowd'. (p.510) He was unlike Herman, who was always attractive to women and chose a vivacious wife; and there is a note of pathos underlying the humorous suggestion - accounted to his engaged friend, Gledhill - that he should advertise himself in the Police Gazette as one who, "having wearied of his hitherto celibate life has decided to appeal to the affection of the gentler sex ..." ⁴⁰ An indissoluble sexual loneliness permeates much of the poetry, and often adheres inevitably to the natural or neurotic unhappiness of many of his ill-matched, frustrated lovers, or his unloved recluses. 'The story' of the former 'was as old as human shame ...

The story of the ashes and the flame.' (p.34)

For the latter it was the uncompromising progression from agony to acceptance and relief:

'If even I am old, and all alone,

I shall have killed one grief, at any rate.' (p.95) -
unless, of course, even old age failed to kill the grief or subdue the restlessness of nature:

'The shadows may creep and the dead men crawl, -

But I follow the women wherever they call ...' (p.74)

Before Robinson left for Harvard (a change that would also serve the ulterior necessity of obtaining specialist medical attention in Boston) he was held in a flux of intense emotional experience. His biographer records:

"With all his humor, his pungent good sense, he was ploughed by emotions as yet uncomprehended and unsubjugated - simple human longing for comradeship, crossed with a hunger for solitude; compassion for the suffering, physical and mental, which he saw in his own home, compassion, the more devastating because it was impotent; troubled speculations on life and on death; a restless mysticism, assured even in its questionings; and a psychic sensitivity that, he suspected, might develop any instant into psychic experience.

His father was becoming interested in spiritualism and making experiments in levitation. Robinson himself, sure of nothing except the inadequacy of the human brain to explore the submerged nine-tenths of human experience, was ready to believe or disbelieve as the facts demanded. One night, he had an adventure which clung uneasily in his memory. Driving past a cemetery, his horse became unaccountably excited. Robinson saw nothing, but he was not sure that the horse, with the clairvoyance that a dog occasionally exhibits, had not actually seen some emanation of the dead.

He found life appalling in its possibilities of
 41
 evil, and bewilderingly complex."

The poet was prone to "The American Nightmare" which Harry Levin
 42
 encounters in the literary exploration of Blackness, and his most inclusive modernisation of the idea is to be found in Avon's Harvest.

It is interesting to note that the personal association with spiritualism is not confined to 'home', not without poetic interest, for Robinson later wrote a sonnet about this aspect of psychic phenomena. Entitled horoscopically "Lingard and the Stars", it begins:

'The table hurled itself, to our surprise,

At Lingard, and anon rapped eagerly ... (p.334)

But this good-natured, warm poem (published in 1910) is a far cry from the earlier personal bewilderment.

Reminiscing upon his Harvard days, Robinson once said;
 "there was something in the place that changed my way of looking
 at a good many things." ⁴³ The few friends he made proved to be fascinating psychological studies, and they warmed somewhat his repressed pallor. Mowry Saben was the most dynamic of these, and George Burnham the most heart-rending.

Saben, who "had been an infant prodigy", persecuted by his father's "policy of repression", and a victim of an almost fatal nervous breakdown, "was a rebel against everything - his father, the doctors, the professional moralists, the whole New England tradition under which he had been born." "Sigmund Freud ... would have rejoiced in" him. He experienced the "forbidden pleasures" and was "reborn". "Robinson, silent, confined, repressed, felt a new sense of life stirring in him at the luxuriant outpouring of Saben's pagan gospel", and became the hedonist's friend. ⁴⁴

Burnham's catastrophe was the amputation of both his feet. To Robinson, he signified "spiritual nobility". The poet "brooded

over his new friend's agony, and made it almost his own."

Moreover, he was not without his own physical difficulties.

There was "the persistent menace of his diseased ear", and the disease threatened to progress to the skull and brain. "The

thought that he might go insane gave his physical suffering an added, diabolical fillip. "It feels a bit like living on the

verge of a volcano", he said to a friend. " The capacity for self-diagnostic questing amid the nightmare realities of the

great within, which vitalises many of his poems and character

studies, was expanding; "it is in my nature to pick over my bones

and growl ..." he wrote Gledhill. ⁴⁶ But his introspections took

him the circuitous way of the dark soul of frustration and sadness -

feelings projected inevitably upon the great without - , and he

was persistently reminded by his shadow (which 'had flown along with him alone ... like Io's evil insect, To sting him when it

would.' - p.550) that the inner journey was perilous. "It was the

nature of things, the cosmos, confronting him in the ultimate

secret places of his thinking, which froze his vision". ⁴⁷

The psychology that Robinson imbibed from William James' courses

and books was evidently not as overwhelming as that he discovered

first-hand, for actual (witnessed or imagined) human processes were

always more interesting to him than the abstract and theoretical

assortment of them. Nevertheless, his early acquaintance with

revolutionary conceptions of human nature and the psyche pointed

forward to the fundamental tendency of his studies of man.

He left Harvard prepared to question conventional morality and

to serve the interests of psychological truth. "Robinson was only

twenty-three", Neff reports, "when he drank in this mature wisdom about the meaning of life and art and about the unconscious character of the creative impulse."⁴⁸

From this point in Robinson's life, as he commenced to write advanced poems, his deepest traits and experiences began to crystallise into the creative patterns which have become familiar to readers of his work. The reticent man's obsession with failure, the psychological poet's tower of introspection, were the directing symbols of the emerging structure.

On his return to Gardiner, Robinson wrote Gledhill: "My life hasn't been such a pleasant affair as some men's seem to be,"⁴⁹ As a poet he possessed sure insight, but as a man he was plagued by doubting, recriminating, guilt-invoking voices - symbols of the New England nightmare conscience. He was their poet if there was ever to be one. "People began to matter to him increasingly" and they "revealed to him something of character and of destiny which he dramatized under names which themselves had haunting undertones."⁵⁰

But the nightmare insistently intruded into his private affairs, to set him apart, to label him "different." Death that had claimed his father was working surely and inevitably in Dean, but in such a slow and insidious and humiliating manner that the poet brooded over it as an all-masterful, unconscious impulse, or a diabolical desire of some hidden self. Dean was 'one whose occupation was to die.' (p.510) He epitomised the tragedy of failure, of the man whose talents were potentially enduring, and

whose human qualities were endearing, in which talent and humanity did not achieve the synthesis of fulfilment and value. The latter courageously endured, but the former disintegrated in sickness, alcohol, morphine, and "heart-breaking hallucinations." 51

Herman's downfall had wider implications. It affected not only his brothers and mother, but also his wife and children; not only the spirit, but also the wherewithal. He lost most of the family estate in investments, and resorted to alcohol. His was the 'sugrunde gehen' of the vital personality and of its capacity for achievement in the great without.

In his lonely existence, Robinson was becoming obsessed with failure that embraced others and, paranoia-like, asserted itself in his breast. His imagination drew him, inwardly, to have a closer look at the chaos of the resident unconscious; and he developed a dual obsession : morbidly, his belief of what extrovert Gardiner thought of him : nostalgically, the introvert's need of the intimacy of a "pipe" and "talk" with an accepted friend. "The issue attained major proportions not because of what others said but of what something inside him was saying. The conflict was not 52 social but spiritual" and he "sought to externalize the struggle."

From perceptions of experiences such as these, Robinson assembled a psychology of universal dilemma, basically twofold, of: without and within, super-ego and id, consciousness and the unconscious, light and darkness, heaven and hell. It involves firstly, the objectivisation of the psychological fall - 'sugrunde gehen' and alienation; and, secondly, the subjectivisation of personal reality -

agonised consciousness and psychic malady. Its imperative is a Weltanschauung of understanding and faith ; its ethic is psychological honesty.

Robinson has analysed the psychology of failure (and of the success of failure contraverted) according to a number of quintessential modes, each of which is separately presented as the idiosyncratic factor. The following modes, for example, prevail in the following long poems: 'pathological' in Avon's Harvest, 'artistic' in The Man Who Died Twice, 'moral' in The Glory of the Nightingales, 'economic' in King Jasper, 'spiritual-and-erotic' in both Roman Bartholow and Matthias at the Door. An erotic basis, either causal or constituent, pertains to each of the failures in these poems, and is bizarre in the first two narratives and conventional in the others. All these modes of failure are depicted in Amaranth.

Robinson's studies of failure relate to two main biographical categories of experience : early life in Gardiner (Tilbury Town) and later life in New York ("The Town Down the River"). And his predilection for this subject was inevitably personal but also artistic. Apart from family and home-town experience, life in the metropolis acquainted him with an extraordinary variety of human beings and provided him with case-book material : the near genius, the social outcast, the eccentric, the psychoneurotic. He had decided artistically that "model citizens don't make good poems." To a reviewer, he commented :

"I have been criticized for writing so much about
'failures'. Well, isn't it the people who fail

who are more interesting than the others?

They are - at least for the purposes of dramatic poetry. There is nothing poetic, and usually

nothing dramatic about anyone who is a 'success' ". 54

Richard Cory, who possessed all the trophies of success - wealth, position, admiration, sexual charm etc. - is a salient example.

He is saved ^{for} by poetry because appearance is deceptive and psychologically shallow, and because he 'put a bullet through his head'. (p.82)

Robinson, like Freud, came to psychology through 'failure'.

Failure was a condition in which Robinson was well versed. The financial catastrophe he etched in "Bewick Finzer", the neurotic tortures and hallucinations his imagination created in the minds of Avon and Fernando Nash, he had known the reality of at home. Exposure of the stupidity of social criteria in values and assessments - with regard to the artist, as in "Zola" and "Verlaine"; the sexual recluse, as in "The Tree in Pamela's Garden" ; the physically unattractive, as in "Vain Gratuities" and "The Rat" - sublimate the private obsession.

"If some of us were not so far behind,

The rest of us were not so far ahead." (p.512)

The grim reality of poverty and displacement in "The Wandering Jew" and Captain Craig (though it is redeemed in the latter by characteristic cheerfulness) was based not only on the situation of a friend, Alfred Louis, but on the poet's New York experience which was for some time relieved only by intermittent resources, charity, fortitude, and humour.

Although Robinson went to New York with grotesque recollections of death and failure, he had the stuff of poetry on paper and in his head

His father lay dying to the accompaniment of inexplicable levitations in the house. His mother had been taken by black diphtheria, dreaded, sudden and ostracising, which affrighted the town and left medical and burial duties in the hands of her sons. Robinson must have wondered 'what inexorable cause Makes Time so vicious in his reaping'.

(p.355) He was sensitive to the unusualness and isolation of the individual case, but felt assuaged by inner fortitude and a conviction that death must be regarded as a deliverance and an advancement.

He had already recast, poetically, experience moulded by environment, such as he saw about him in Gardiner. "Men and houses, finally Gardiner itself, became enlarged into symbols and achieved dignity". The poet created a "symbolic community, built around a cash-box, a till, this modern age in miniature, which he called
⁵⁵
 Tillbury Town." His isolated, introspective personality was clearly defined. Hagedorn reports that apart from a few separate friendships, Robinson "kept the world outside the gate" and "withdrew within himself".⁵⁶

Poetry was conceived as a form of dedication to the human spirit, a clinical procedure, employing the art of language, that would reveal humanity and inhumanity and express man's truest self to himself. He wrote Moody: "My conscience tells me that New York is the place for me. I must have the biggest conglomeration of humanity and inhumanity that
⁵⁷
 America affords." His attitude was psychological, not sociological; his values spiritual, not economic. From time to time, he attempted to interpret the prevailing spiritual condition of the mass - for example the blindness, darkness, and neuroticism of the collective psyche described in "The Valley of the Shadow" - but the majority of his account

of the human condition are studies in individual psychology.

In a few of the short poems, for example, "The Wandering Jew", "The Poor Relation", and "Old Trails", the city is envisaged realistically and symbolically and provides a background for felt impressions as well as a setting. The modern American city was the nimbus and nucleus uniting psyche and world. The images of childhood become the realities of adulthood. The observer in "The Wandering Jew" records the impression:

'I knew the man as I had known

His image when I was a child.' (p.456)

But gregarious multi-modernism could not isolate isolation:

'all the newness of New York

Had nothing new in loneliness ...' (p.456)

There is always 'The lonely chagelessnessⁿ of dying', the poet tells us in "The Poor Relation"; 'like a giant harp ...'

'The City trembles, throbs, and pounds

Outside, and through a thousand sounds

The small intolerable drums

Of Time are like slow drops descending.' (p.47)

City and world are customarily outsiders in Robinson's poems. The house, the room, or simply the mind, are the most favoured settings for animation and predicament, and they induce mental action and the confession of intimacies. The poet received diverse impressions of the workings of mind and man, of loneliness and suffering, in New York's street, tenement, underground, and office.

To a man who was "well aware of" his "hopeless limitations when
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anything with 'Community' pasted on it rolls into sight", and who

declared that his "trouble" dated back to his realisation "at the age of five, that I was never going to be able to elbow my way to the Trough of Life",⁵⁹ worldly extroversion presented not only its terrors but signified an alarming deficiency of self-cognition, in the community at large. The group lacks the self-reflection of the healthy individuals; the war-torn world in Merlin (suggested by the first World War)⁶⁰ founders through a lack of psychoanalytic rationality. The kingdom ought "to be a mirror wherein men May see themselves and pause." (p.313)

The mirror Robinson held to himself often seemed to reflect the neglected, suffering, despairing, insecure artist. But instead of allowing that artist to ~~stagnate~~^{hebetate} in maudlin self-pity (the fate of Count Pretzel von Würsburger, the Obscene, in Captain Craig), he imagined where such self-analysis, at the behest of a grappling, sensitive mind, might lead. Characters emerged. He sought to commune with their thoughts below the threshold, and to encourage these thoughts to rise to the surface and confront their owner as an image of himself. It was then up to him, during a long and tortuous analysis, to cast off the narcissistic habit and dissolve the schizophrenic illusion in the light of second birth. The Man Who Died Twice and "Old Trails" are examples, major and miniature respectively, of the imaginative reworking of personal knowledge concerning the plight of the struggling artist in the metropolis. Fernando Nash suffers the above stages of self-analysis. In a manner suggesting the poeticizing of clinical procedure, and the psychological adoption of an E.A.Poe incubus, the analysis commences as follows :

'he sat before a glass

That was more like a round malevolent eye
 Filmed with too many derelict reflections,
 Appraising there a bleared and heavy face
 Where sodden evil should have been a stranger.

"What are you doing here? And who are you? "

He mumbled, with a cloudy consciousness
 Of having felt a ghostly blow in the face
 From an unseemly mirrored visitor
 That he had not invited.'

Eventually Robinson's own mirror reflected success and recognition to a grateful and dumbfounded beholder. During the last quarter of his life he was outwardly more secure and inwardly more placid. Next Door to a Poet records sketchy reminiscences of Brown's friendship with Robinson at the Peterborough colony. Brown confirms impressions of Robinson already mentioned; reticence, inhibition, introspection, "mental aliveness", silence, nervousness, sensitivity, "outward quietude" - traits which recur time and again in many of the portraits and character studies. He notes the poet's hypersensitivity to crowded gatherings and the lamented realisation that he was "a poor conversationalist." He verifies Robinson's interest in psychology and the fundamental problems of life; he observes his awareness of the integral importance and wisdom of the smallest detail and his consciousness of the past as nightmare. "As for the earlier years - the years that stretched back past the turn of the century - they were a nightmare, even in retrospect." ⁶¹ Robinson's poetic biography of psychic life is not unaffected by the dark struggle for freedom from mental and spiritual dilemmas implanted during earlier life.

It is not surprising that so conscientious an artist as Robinson, who often constructed his poems around the first person principle, endeavoured to detach himself from the rational and emotional content of his work. He believed that he always expressed the 'I' who is not 'I'. Such detachment is not absolutely feasible of course. It has been observed that what might be termed the Robinsonian master-faculty, depth introspection, has often determined the poet's approach to character revelation and has often been transferred to the characters themselves. Apart from the conscious embodiment of personal belief and idea, a certain degree of unconscious projection and participation on the part of the author is inevitable in all art. Overall, however, Robinson is an exceptionally detached artist in a highly subjective literary age; and such detachment is invaluable in a writer who renders intense and intricate subjective experience, as does Robinson. In the main, he preserves the distinction between detachment and subjectivity, a distinction often blurred in the work of more reputable writers who confuse the two. His detachment informs his method, which is a habit of regarding people in much the same way as a psychotherapist regards his patients. He encourages and manipulates confessions not his own but which he can appreciate and participate in imaginatively. He cherishes artistically such ethical and charitable ideals of observation as impartiality, understanding, tolerance, fortitude, unprejudiced evaluation etc. Occasionally, especially in some of the short poems, detachment clashes with psychological explication, the result being that essential motives may be left obscure in deranged parabola. Such is the case in "Doctor of Billiards":

'Of all among the fallen from on high,
 We count you last and leave you to regain
 Your born dominion of a life made vain
 By three spheres of insidious irony.
 You dwindle to the lesser tragedy -
 Content, you say. We call, but you remain.
 Nothing alive gone wrong could be so plain,
 Or quite so blased with obscurity.

You click away the kingdom that is yours,
 And you click off your crown for cap and bells;
 You smile, who are still master of the feast,
 And for your smile we credit you the least;
 But when your false, unhallowed laugh occurs,

We seem to think there may be something else.' (p.345)

Notwithstanding the dubious irony of the author's remark that the
 poem "is not a plea for the suppression of vice",⁶² nor the possibility
 that underlying the poem is a faint Freudian simile (implicit in
 isolated but obvious words and in the symbolic "three" and "cap and
 bells"), the deliberate explication of the man's behaviour is
 consciously avoided by the poet who confesses that the "man ...
 seems to be throwing away a life which, for some reason known only
 to himself, is no longer worth living."⁶³

An imaginative explorer of other people's personal worlds,
 Robinson was naturally reticent towards any suspicion of self-
 projection; and this factor probably underlies the paradox of the
 following remark contained in the same letter as his statement about

"Doctor of Billiards"; "While nearly everything that I have written has a certain amount of personal coloring, I do not recall anything of mine that is a direct transcription of experience." ⁶⁴ As has already been intimated, the psychology of the creator and the nature of his personal experiences influenced the introspective quality of his work. "The Pilot" and "Exit", for example, while of undoubted general relevance, were inspired by the fate of the poet's ⁶⁵ brothers.

The poet's life and personality led him to the inner realities, the psychic worlds undisclosed by external appearance.

THE POET AND PURITANISM

(1)

Appraisals of E.A. Robinson's poetry have inevitably drawn attention to the poet's New Englandism and have postulated, but not clarified, a relationship between his psychology and his Puritanism. Perhaps Ledoux, the poet's friend and ally, has stated the general position as clearly as any. He refers to Robinson's seriousness, his interest in sin and atonement, and his creed of forgiveness through understanding. Of this "creed" Ledoux says : "if this attitude of mind is not characteristic of the stern New Englandism of the Puritans, it is at least a logical modern development from it." ⁶⁶ It is this attitude of mind, he maintains, which enhances the "psycho-analytical" nature of the probing studies "in individual character".

This consideration for the purely human and psychological elements in a dramatic situation, as opposed to the application of a theoretical and puritanical code, is doubly emphasised in "Ben Trovato"

firstly, by the wife who attended her "blind", "wandering", dying husband by so dressing herself to appear before him as "the other woman" he had always loved ("Could she forgive All that? Apparently"); secondly, by the deacon (recounting the episode) who refrained from pontificating over those who were

"Allurable to no sure theorem,

The scorn or the humility of man."

and did not "condemn

The benefaction of a stratagem

Like hers - and I'm a Presbyterian." (p.575)

It has been the custom among some critics to define and explain the weaknesses of Robinson's poetry on the basis of what Amy Lowell terms an "ingrained Puritanism". The poetess contends that this Puritanism is evidenced in "a battle between individual bravery and
67
paralyzing atavism", between "the probing active mind" and "inherited
68
prejudice and training." This conflict, which she says produces melancholy, cynicism, 'ethical unrest' (to borrow the phrase from "Flamonde"), and superstition, is undoubtedly present in such characters as Roman Bartholow and Avon; but it would not be strictly accurate to claim that it is mainly an aspect of the poet himself. In Bartholow's case 'ativism' and 'inherited prejudice' are conquered and it may be assumed that the author believes it right and healthy that they should be. Avon, by contrast, surely represents a sober warning against the madness attendant on soul-fear and Puritan psychic anxiety when, in this conflict, the unconscious holds sway. If such "ingrained Puritanism" is quite obviously an explained feature of a

created personality it is superfluous to look too deeply for it in the author himself.

Less fastidious critics of Robinson - T.K. Whipple is a representative example of the authoritative generaliser and cursory explicator who 'has the thing in a nutshell' - rebuke him for supposedly withdrawing from life, repudiating the world, and not making healthy contact with his environment. These factors are said to account for "a chronic depression" and to represent a "spirit of denial", "an incapacity to live", "an antagonism to reality", which inhibit "that surrender or letting-go, that self-⁶⁹ abandonment and self-forgetfulness, necessary for experience."⁷⁰

Whipple indulges in the elementary but erroneous dogmatism that embraces synecdoche and characterises the writer according to a certain aspect on the surface of his work; such evaluation is too prone to identify the author with certain of his characters, with his subject, and in Robinson's case particularly with a form of Puritanism which is presented not for its own sake - it is not advocated - but for the purpose of critical inference on the part of the reader.

Robinson does not repudiate life in writing about people who impose barriers between themselves and life - that would be almost as ludicrous a confusion of logic as to maintain that his poems fail because he writes about people who fail. He confronts life with an uncompromising determination not to hide from its unpleasant side, and there is little evidence of 'denial' in the psychological realities and maladies he portrays. He does not accept either easy optimism or a laissez-faire attitude to human relationships; and his personal vision, far from breeding 'chronic depression', is inspired by the

pulse and light of all life, and postulates a release from self-centredness without advocating hedonism. He is a psychologist, not an 'escapologist', whose experience of human behaviour produces a valid ego psychology; he was little less aware than Freud, of the fundamental selfhood underlying human motivation, and saw that the limitations of the human ego was a factor to be reckoned with and that "self-abandonment and self-forgetfulness" quite often resulted only in another kind of self-tyranny.

"There is no cure for self;

There's only a occasional revelation,

Arriving not infrequently too late." (p.1137)

What may be the central fact about such persons as Vickery, Miniver Cheevy, the man in "Doctor of Billiards", Ferguson, Avon, Garth, and the people in the 'wrong world' of Anarant - "This repudiation of the world, this movement of desire away from reality" -
 71
 is not, as Whipple suggests, "the central fact about Robinson." These characters are intended to indicate the Puritan Nemesis - the futility, and pathos of negation and unreal desire - and as such the 'fact' about their author (not necessarily 'the central fact') is contrary to that assumed by Whipple. And surely the estimable quality of such men as Old King Cole, Erasmus, Shadrach O'Leary, St. Paul, John Brown, the man outside 'The Dark House', Matthias, and Fargo is their capacity to come to grips with 'the world' and 'reality' either by displaying fortitude or wisdom or faith in facing unalterable circumstances or by acting constructively, bringing about a change of character, as a result of self-analysis. Moreover, Whipple neglects to consider the ambiguities implicit in his assumption. Some people,

like the aging lady in "The Poor Relation" who has a lived past (a time when 'friends who clamored for her place ... would have scratched her for her face'), are in fact

'Safe in a comfortable cage

From which there will be no more flying.' (p.47)

Nor is the criterion of 'world', 'life', or 'reality' necessarily the same for all types. For Lancelot, Guinevere

'was the world

That he was losing; and the world he sought

Was all a tale for those, who had been living,

And had not lived.' (p.449)

That Robinson's conscious attitude to life was not one of Puritan anxiety in the face of it, nor of escape from it, is made clear in a letter he wrote in 1932. He declared:

"Of course I am never really bitter, or anything but cheerful and full of metaphysical joy and hope, but people don't seem to understand that and so call me all sorts of names which also they don't understand. So far as I can make out, most people are so afraid of life that when they see it coming their first impulse is to get behind a tree and shut their eyes. And for some odd reason they call that impulse optimism - which has always seemed funny to me."

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This "impulse ... to get behind a tree" is the unconscious compulsion that produces the universal neurosis of man; and it is this lethargy and anxiety which Robinson psychoanalytically examines, and by inference, repudiates. He is a proficient post-psychologist who generally knows

that his personal realisation is of no importance if shouted from Parnassus, for it is up to each individual to find his own salvation; his task is simply to reveal the struggle to attain it within the deepest reaches of the subjective self.

(11)

To avoid the kind of critical synecdoche alluded to in the above paragraphs, it is necessary to consider any Robinsonian characteristics which may have qualified his assent to life and so, perhaps, have suggested a basis for negative and excessive critical pronouncements. There are undoubtedly elements of the author's introspective, in some ways Puritan, personality in some portions of the poetry. His complex faculty of self-analysis, discussed in the previous section of the chapter, is at times conducive to psychological over-subtlety, peripheral intellectual entanglement, and convoluted verbal introversions, which are to be found in parts of certain long poems - in Roman Bartholow for instance. This may be put down to a Puritan idiosyncrasy that displaces overt experiences or excludes certain vigorous aspects of physical life. On the other hand, this is an aspect of Robinsonian psychology. Roman Bartholow analyses the problem of the modern (albeit Puritan or New England) consciousness in a kind of literary clinical procedure - an endeavour more readily amenable to the straight-out novel form as, for example, Conrad Aiken demonstrates in Great Circle. Thus it should not be forgotten that the problem of representing life differs according to the artist's method and according to his interpretation of what constitutes

reality, nor that the creative problem, in the present instance, is as much - if not more so - technical as it is ideological. Like most artists whose attitude to sensual experience is austere clinical (Roman Bartholow), or unadulteratedly human, 'commonplace' and radiant ("Isaac and Archibald"), or consciously and richly artistic (Merlin), or an incongruous blend of rarefied soul-searching and 'hot-lips' (Matthias at the Door), and unlike poets such as Rimbaud, Dylan Thomas, and Carl Sandburg whose respective mystical, monodic, and metropolitan attitudes to life are almost exclusively and robustly sensual, Robinson sometimes found it difficult to describe direct passionate experience in equally direct language and still make expression and experience accord with truth and life.

Robinson was consistent in his attempt to fuse desire and reality, the pulse and rationality, without indulging in sentimentality, which he regarded as "far worse than death".⁷³ It is understandable that he was "in doubt as to some of the mushy parts"⁷⁴ in Tristram, not simply as a result of native Puritan reticence but, fundamentally, because of the technical problem and of the detachment necessitated by his narrative form. He was on the side of love even if, at times, with irresistible pathos; he was on the side of experience even if, at times, with verbosity. And, in most of the short poems, the life of the world - of Tilbury Town, Boston, New York - is unquestionably true to life. There is no question of Robinsonian repression save in an impersonal sense; for example, in the psychological realism of the objective studies; suicide in "The Mill", the death instinct in relation to Eros in "Lake Havergal", the erotic instinct in relation

to death in "The Whip", sexual abnegation in "The Tree in Pamela's Garden", sexual indiscretion in "The Growth of Lorraine". In each of these poems concerned with hidden reasons and unconscious motives, the author's attitude is decidedly anti-puritanical; it is tolerant, understanding, psychologically humane but frank. Sympathetic to the humiliating power of the erotic impulse and its frustration, the poet's humanity is exemplified at the conclusion of "The Whip": addressing the wronged husband who preferred death, the poet undogmatically queries the circumstances:

'Is it so?

And she - she struck the blow,

You but a neck behind ...

You saw the river flow -

Still, shall I call you blind? ' (p.339)

The poet refuses unpuritanically to judge, morally, issues psychologically complicated or insufficiently explicated. This attitude is stated simply in another poem, "The Unforgiven", which demonstrates the psychical frequency of erotic blindness:

'The story would have many pages

And would be neither good nor bad'. (p.37)

Robinson's meaning generally has to be inferred from what his characters do, by the tone in which something is said, and frequently by what is not said explicitly or not said at all. As his attitude to his characters or subject is so often ironic, it would be inadvertent to regard them as the advocates or the opinions of the author; they do not represent him but are intended to represent aspects

of humanity. He applies the scalpel to exaggerated or intolerant minds and attitudes thereby inferring, without resorting to imperfect statement, more propitious possibilities. His irony is positive - it should not be confused with cynicism, a form of repudiation, - and the essence of method. Robinson employed the method more industriously in the short poems than elsewhere. By not taking it into account, in the manner of Whipple, evaluation of the poetry inclines to distortion, and misunderstanding of Robinson's "ingrained Puritanism" or of "the central fact about" him results.

On certain occasions the author was reluctantly obliged to draw attention to his method in answer to accusation of "chronic depression" or of "antagonism to reality". Two examples suffice. In "The Man Against the Sky" the poet attacks the philosophic dogmatism of materialism. His intention, culminating in the last line "Where all who know may drown", is to show that the materialists' pretension to knowledge of other than finite matters is ludicrous because they think they 'know' whereas it is impossible to know. Amy Lowell described the poem as "pessimistic". The author wrote to her "to correct, or try to correct" this view. The letter contains the following statement:

"In the closing pages I meant merely, through what I supposed to be an obviously ironic medium, to carry materialism to its logical end and to indicate its futility as an explanation or a justification of existence. Perhaps you will read the poem again sometime and observe my 'lesson' in the last line."

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With this in mind, it is evident that there is an enormous difference

in meaning if the last lines are read ironically and not superficially...

' 'There sure but weaklings' vain distress
To suffer dungeons where so many doors
Will open on the cold eternal shores
That look sheer down
To the dark tideless floods of Nothingness
Where all who know may drown. '

Perceptive of the irony, one agrees with the poet that the 'difference' between the two readings is the difference between pessimism (the materialistic viewpoint) and profundity. That Whipple is unaware of the ironic method is evidenced by his statement, "for him (Robinson) to live is to 'suffer dungeons' ".⁷⁶

The second example of misunderstanding is relevant to the present discussion of Robinson's Puritanism and New Englandism, and concerns the sonnet "New England". In this poem, first published in 1923, and republished in the 1925 volume (appropriately coinciding with the period of the 'new freedom'), the ironic method is used to expose the sham psychology of the libertine, hedonistic irrationalists who attack New Englandism along conventional lines. They probably symbolise the Robinsonian type who is 'blind with self' in the mad pursuit for self-divestment. The poem does not champion any form of Puritanism, but implies simply that New England has progressed far beyond the Scarlet Letter society, and that it is not, in the main, characterised by "emotional and moral frigidity." Robinson was accused of attacking New England in the manner of the "patronizing pagans". He found himself forced to reply to the effect that the poem satirised, in fact, the latter's attitude. "The poem" he said

contained "an oblique attack upon all those who are forever throwing dead cats at New England for its alleged emotional and moral frigidity". And he added: "Interpretation of one's irony is always a little distressing, yet in this instance, it appears to be rather necessary." ⁷⁷ As a result of this irony, the argument of the poem is necessarily the negative of what is stated, i.e. the negative of the facile criticism of New England. This 'argument' does not envisage demudation of the primal instincts (to which, Robinson believed, man should be true); by implication, rather, it approves a psychology which has no regard for a super-ego that is coddling, macabre, anachronistic, or purely repressive - 'Conscience' that

'always has the rocking-chair,

Cheerful as when she tortured into fits

The first cat that was ever killed by Care.' (p.901)

Robinson maintains simply that the passionate, loving, joyous, conscientious side of man can be expressed meaningfully, free from 'complexes', without resort to demonic feasting or the irresponsible attitudinising of those hypocritical agitators who 'crying wildest ... have drunk the least.'

(111)

'Sex' is the hidden, but recurring, issue when Puritanism is debated and is often at the back of criticism such as Whipple's. Generally speaking, Robinson's attitude to sex is that of an intelligent person in whom perspective is not unduly distorted by personal factors (as it well may have been from all accounts); and it is possible to demonstrate that "ingrained Puritanism" stirred in the poet neither

morbid enquiry nor unhealthy repression. Avon's Harvest, the author's most unhealthy work, is admittedly a possible exception to this statement, for it seems likely that the poet was unconscious of several implications in the poem. However, his detachment together with the narrator's impartiality and common sense, save him from any kind of obnoxious participation in the action or expression of his own self immersed in it, such as that of many minor and inartistic - often surrealist, 'off-beat', or simply deranged - writers who are to-day all too common. And even in Avon's Harvest Robinson poetically succeeds in removing himself from the involuntary emasculation of his character. Perhaps he is generally as successful in this respect as was Henry James.

The kind of Puritanism in Avon's Harvest is obviously regarded as detrimental, for the author forcibly demonstrates that it leads to psychic disintegration. It is analysed objectively. Robinson demonstrates the logical consequences of Puritanism in a mind that cannot assimilate the life force because of his hereditary and tainted compulsion to regard desire as evil. Imagination invents hidden devils to inhabit the human heart; the id forces a plague upon consciousness and finally effects total derangement. This is what happens to Avon as Cestre (whose explications met with Robinson's approval) correctly observes: "Robinson remembers the blood-curdling sights of hellish horrors that used to appal the early Puritans, and he makes Avon an heir to their gloomy moping." ⁷³ Avon thus represents, on one level, the past in the present, - phylogenetic consciousness, which prevents him from achieving a desirable modern consciousness, in a modern setting. The weakness due to "outworn Puritan inheritance

that Amy Lowell ascribed to Robinson is the very weakness that the poet exemplifies in Avon! Avon, like his ancestors, invents the enemy necessitated by repression, but, unlike them, his projection fails to preserve him; he cannot dispose of his devil. The unconscious does not recognize the ordained moral order; its principle is reversal; the wicked executes the righteous. Ludwig Lewisohn has described this phenomenon of the early Puritan mind in the following way: "An enemy is invented, an evil one, one upon whom both guilt and punishment can be rolled, who is both instigator and sacrifice, who both explains the moral torment in which men find themselves and expiates it for them." ⁸⁰ This is a remarkably accurate account of the origin of Avon's neurosis which began when he was at school. The sexual basis of the neurosis is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

The setting of another dark case-study, Cavender's House, is similarly New England. This long poem also deals with a facet of Puritan atrophy in the familiar psychological manner, but is alleviated by the positive avowal of New England conscience. Cavender's ingrained Puritanism led to a situation which atrophied his marital, hence sexual, life and occasioned the eruption of an aggression not uncharacteristic of Puritan demonology. Repression - Cavender's suppression of guilt concerning his erotic rage and moral wrong - set in for a period of twelve years, thus bringing about slow and stagnant psychosis. The mind, however, in a last desperation, confronted reality by unleashing the super-ego and projecting it as the image of Cavender's dead wife. The subsequent psychic conflict forced Cavender to face his unconscious self, and the judicious aspect

of inherent Puritanism proved stronger than the atavistic aspect. Cavender's projection succeeds whereas Avon's fails, the reason being that the former is composed mainly of the constructive elements of personality whereas the latter is composed mainly of the destructive elements of personality. The naturalistic content in each poem is slight and serves mainly to provide a bare minimum of structural support for the real content - psychological drama. The method is preponderantly introspective ; hence, in neither poem is psychology very dependent upon naturalism. This confinement, which is largely a technical matter, accounts both for Robinson's individual achievement and for his artistic limitation. The essential individualism of these poems is characteristic of the Puritan dilemma, a dilemma which the poet understood and symbolised. Avon's Harvest and Cavender's House are symbols of psychic life.

These poems illustrate Robinson's capacity for imaginative discernment in two fundamentally different conditions of the sexual and moral dilemma, and provide convincing evidence of the remoteness of Puritan prudishness in his poetry. Also remote, on the contrary, is the direct or naturalistic expression of orgasmic life which, either in actuality or denial, is often indirectly recollected in anxiety during a clinical process of revelation. The two qualities synthesised make for irony, subtlety, depth and balance; the qualities opposed make for over-intellectualisation and a predominance of oral action.

The poet's attitude to the love question is therefore of significance. He affects psychological interest and personal aloofness in such clinical studies as "The Book of Annadale",

"The Whip", "The Clinging Vine", "The Unforgiven", Roman Bartholomew and Cavender's House, and poeticizes emotion in the romantic Arthurian poems. He strived to see the truth and put it into language, even if he couldn't share it directly and personally in life. Saben observed at Harvard that "His attitude toward sex had the veritable horror feminae in it", yet Hagedorn observes in the same context that Robinson, transformed by beer, "had a fund of Robelaisian anecdotes so rich and so remarkable that even Saben was a little shocked." And the biographer then adds a much later comment by the poet who said that his "comprehension of human psychology [when he was at Harvard] was so lacking in depth that I could not understand that a risqué story might be an expression of one's abhorrence of what one apparently enjoyed."

Robinson's understanding became more analytically profound after he left Harvard. He became engrossed in the subconscious sources of motivation in his search for human material that would make poems. The complemental and compensatory relationship between the conscious and unconscious systems (his statement above is a simple example) formed a basis for the presentation of character. Men such as Cavender and Matthias, erotically confused, hold outward respect and authority that is complemented by inward weakness and insecurity; passionate desirous women such as Gabrielle and Natalie are forced to compensate their frustration in illusions of happiness and tolerable resignation superseded by inevitable unfaithfulness in deed, Gabrielle, and in thought, Natalie.

Questions concerning the irrational and motives arising from

love feelings gave Robinson cause for contemplation soon after he left Harvard. Occasional letters in Untriangulated Stars provide clues to the direction of his thinking. In one letter he informs Smith : "I prefer men and women who live, breathe, talk, fight, make love, or go to the devil after the manner of human beings. Art is only valuable to me when it reflects humanity or at least human emotions." ⁸³ A year later in 1895 he writes : "Sometimes I think instinct is only another name for divine knowledge and sometimes I don't think much about it anyway." ⁸⁴ He places important reservations upon the percipience and worth of instinct, indeed, but does not yield to "the undying Puritan conviction that man and nature and man's instincts are from the beginning evil and without hope." ⁸⁵

Robinson is too thoughtful and too empirically honest to fall victim to such an over-severe 'conviction'. He depicts various forms of evil, undoubtedly, but his attitude to man is not perverted by them; and when the 'conviction' is to be found in his work, as in Avon's Harvard, it is seen to be a sign of psychic malady. The Puritan element in Robinson is mostly refined into psychological realism and symbolism, and is rarely expressed directly. "Another Dark Lady" with its grotesque visualisation of the Puritan anima, is one of the most doubtful exceptions.

'There was a road

Through beeches; and I said their smooth feet showed
Like yours. Truth must have heard me from afar,
For I shall never have to learn again
That yours are cloven as no beech's are.' (p.42)

Yet he generally discovers and defines evil in much the same way as Freud: according to psychological criteria; the operations of the psyche instead of Satan.

Robinson transposes the mythology and demonology of fatalistic Puritanism into non-religious psychic symbolism. Thus, through introjection, 'devils', 'demons', and 'ghosts' serve as convenient metaphors for subconscious forces. They are of a psychotic, not a Luciferian variety, and establish connection between the introspective faculty and the unconscious in such studies as "An Island", "Old Trails", "Fragment", The Man Who Died Twice, Cavender's House, and King Jasper. Napoleon, subject to delusion, hallucination, and near-madness in "An Island", is possessed by a 'primordial' 'demon' that is 'irretrievably astray' (p.328); the central character in "Old Trails" (p.p.33-37) has 'an incubus' 'among the ghosts' 'of the past', and must 'put away' 'what was dead of him' before he might attain 'A placid and a proper consciousness'; Briony in "Fragment", like Honoria in King Jasper, is obsessed by unseen enemies that "Sooner or later ... strike." (p.49) To Alexandra Genevieve says:

'The farthest hidden things are still, my dear.

They make no noise. They creep from where they live

And ^rstike us in the dark; and then we suffer. (p.381)

Robinson's world-picture includes an objective mixture of evil and good, largely unconscious in origin, and is expressed mythologically and even naturalistically on occasions and psychologically in general. "Another Dark Lady" depicts mythological evil in a woman who is compared to Lilith, whereas Merlin depicts in Vivian

a mythopoetic Eve unsullied by evil but passionate by nature. A universal mythology of evil, referred to in "The Garden of the Nations", includes conscious manifestation ('The blight above') and unconscious genesis ('evil at the root'):

'The blight above, where blight has always been,

And the old worm of evil at the root ... ' (p.902)

Universal good, on the other hand, illumines the Scheme, as the following mixed metaphor from "The Garden" affirms :

'there were all the lives of humankind;

And they were like a book that I could read,

Whose every leaf, miraculously signed,

Outrolled itself from Thought's eternal seed,

Love-rooted in God's garden of the mind.' (p.87)

The book of life, read in the light of divine consciousness, represents the flowering of the tree of man, the unconscious roots of which grow from God.

At times Robinson portrayed evil naturalistically: overtly in "Aaron Stark" -

'Withal a meagre man was Aaron Stark,

Cursed and unkempt, shrewd, shrivelled, and morose.

A miser was he, with a miser's nose,

And eyes like little dollars in the dark.' (p.86) -

innately in the character of Modred,

"with his anger for his birth,

And the black malady of his ambition - " (p.401)

But Robinson discerned the bona fide human impulse within 'the grim dominion' of Zolaism. Opposed to the material greed of

"Aaron Stark" is the philanthropy of "A Man in Our Town". In appearance the Man 'was not one for man to marvel at', but below the surface was 'His homely genius for emergencies.'

'There was an increase in a man like that;

And though he be forgotten, it was good

For more than one of you that he was here.' (p.886)

And opposed to the political greed of Modred is the political wisdom of Merlin, who has archetypal and superhuman insight, and of Roosevelt who, the poet infers, could 'rend' 'the soul' beneath 'the surface'. (p.360)

Psychologically, the poet's presentation of good and evil is relative to such amoral factors of determinism as the unconscious, heredity and environment; to such ego factors as self-preservation, self-gratification and discretion; and to such rational factors of morality as justice, value and authority. Robinson demonstrates ^{on} ~~empirically~~ and time after time that the complex psyche cannot be comprehended simply on the basis of conventional right and wrong, and perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in The Man Who Died Twice. In this powerful study of the artistic temperament, good and evil are subordinate to the tragic conflict between personality and purpose. The poet realises that the tensions in the mind, or 'creative charnel house', are so titanic that the division between psychical heaven and hell, creative reason and destructive irrationalism, between 'daemon' and 'devil', is extremely slender. Fernando Nash's split psyche reverberates the conflict by means of interior debate:

"There was a daemon in you, not a devil,
 Who told you then that when you heard those drums
 Of death, it would be death to follow them.
 You were to trust your daemon and to wait,
 And wait, and still to wait. You had it - once

Why did you have to kill yourself like this?

Why did you let the devil's retinue

That was to be a part be everything,

And so defeat your daemon ... " (p.928)

Nash's conflict may indeed be arranged into the convenient dualism of good and evil - of 'desecrated humility' and 'unfrosted honesty'; 'self-contempt attending revelation', and the "soul" against 'arrogance', 'venom', 'devils', 'malicious' 'infernal' 'fantasy', and the 'evil rites Of death' - but the relevance of such duality is essentially psychological and artistic. The unconscious inspiration that gives rise to the rat symphony produces the celestial symphony. The dream Censor is powerless to exclude the destructive intrusion of 'unclean laughter'; the rat musicians enter the mind's conscious room through the 'keyhole'. Nor is the creative vision denied admittance, however:

'The quivering miracle of architecture

That was uprising lightly out of chaos,

And out of all the silence under time,

Was a gay temple where the Queen of Life

And her most loyal minions were protracting

Melodious and incessant festival ... ' (p.p.948-9)

But the anima's 'festive pageant' is superseded by the inferno of 'uninvited strangers' -

'A singing horde of demons, men and women,
 Who filled the temple with offensive yells
 And sang to flight the frightened worshippers.' (p.949) -
 whom the Censor cannot keep out.

The psychological evaluation of moral concepts, to the fore in Robinson's poetry, is one of the most influential and contentious^u themes in modern literature. In American literature that is orientated to the New England tradition, especially the classic novelists Hawthorne, Melville and James, the theme is frequently characterised by moral, and to a lesser extent ethical, ambiguity. And this ambiguity is to be found, possibly as a mature form of self-critical Puritanism, in such poems as "Verlaine", "Flammonde", Roman Bartholow and The Glory of the Nightingales. Flammonde, 'Withheld ... from the destinies' - which were nearly his - because of a 'small satanic sort of kink' (p.5), saw worthiness in a 'scarlet' woman 'On whom the fashion was to frown' ...

'And what he saw we wondered at -

That none of us in her distress,

Could hide or find our littleness.' (p.4)

Although "Flammonde" may be a slight, rather naive revelation of moral confusion, the same cannot be said of Nightingale who represents the essential ambiguity of good resulting from evil.

Robinson's depiction of evil is also alleviated by the spirit of comedy. "Llewellyn and the Tree", for example, is an amusing adaption of Biblical myth. Ironical comedy is the tenor of "Theophilus", in which the central character, whose name means 'lover of God', is an evil fellow. The comedy is "Uncle Ananias",

however, is a delightful but penetrating revision of Puritan ethics; untruthfulness, in this instance, is salutary as well as human. Uncle Ananias 'sinned enough to make the day sublime', and was loved for the 'perennial inspiration of his lies.' (p.338)

The poet's 'Figure in the Carpet' thus differs from that of hereditary Puritanism in that it (1) can not be evaluated in psychological ignorance; (2) can not be judged humanly and singly from either the good or evil moral position; (3) can not be appreciated entirely without a serious sense of humour and an awareness of comedy. Each of these conditions represents a release from dogmatism and is conducive to objectivity and impartiality. The men one has 'slandered' in life may in death be heard 'singing in the sun'. (p.97) 'Who of us, being what he is, May scoff at others' ecstasies?' (p.354) the poet asks in "Atherton's Gambit." Therefore,

'May we who are alive be slow

To tell what we shall never know.' (p.341)

The 'common code' of Puritanical Tilbury Town, more pleased with ways more like its own (p.886), is often shown to be most astray when assessing people of true worth, whom it misrepresents, and people of dubious sexual morality, whom it slanders. Robinson, in his poetry, sees little sense in making a moral fuss about the latter group of people concerning whom his attitude is one of psychological curiosity. He of course held no brief for the puritanical view, the 'squeamish and emasculate crusade' (p.85), of the world at large which vilified men like Zola because they refused to hide behind a tree when they saw life coming.

Robinson's detachment, especially to sexual intimacy, is in line with that of French authors he admired and with his predisposition to regard sex as a biological fact to be taken for granted. This attitude, reflected in many of the short studies of sexual conflict and erotic blindness, is axiomatic in the narratives of the later years. Brown observes, not surprisingly, that "a serious volume on sex" was to be found, alongside the King James Bible, Oscar Wilde, or Havelock Ellis' Impressions, in the poet's studio.⁸⁶ And Robinson remarked to Mrs. Richards that "sex is important, the Lord knows,⁸⁷ but even Solomon didn't think of it all the time." Barnard comments in this context: "This calm acceptance perhaps explains why Robinson is so unexpectedly tolerant of sexual intimacy unsanctioned by marriage."⁸⁸ His interest in the subject is psychological and spiritual, not ethical, as is revealed by the numerous instances of adultery in the Arthurian poems, Roman Bartholow, "The Story of the Ashes and the Flame", "The Whip", "London Bridge", "The Evangelist's Wife" and "Job the Rejected". Barnard rightly observes that Robinson "clearly does not join with Roman Bartholow in reproaching Gabrielle for her affair with Penn-Raven", and treats Laramie's hypothetical infidelity "as of little consequence."⁸⁹ This characteristic substitution of clinical objectivity in place of Puritan condemnation is evidence of the poet's humanity. "The Growth of Lorraine" is an example concerning promiscuity. The poem concludes with Lorraine's letter to her friend; it mentions her suicide and concludes:

"You do not frown because I call you friend,
For I would have you glad that I still keep
Your memory, and even at the end -

Impenitent, sick, shattered - cannot curse

The love that flings, for better or for worse,

This worn-out, cast-out flesh of mine to sleep." (p.192)
is evident

Robinson's unclamorous acceptance of sex[^] in relation not only to his psychology and humanity but also to his elementary and romantic realism and his technical tendency to evaluate the psycho-physical in long, poetic introspections and conversations. Tristram is a case in point. The poet regarded the situation of the lovers as psychologically unexceptional and akin to that evidenced in divorce courts the world over. "You know this sort of thing happens every day", he told Bates, "I mean people love the way Tristram and Isolt were supposed to ... It is not rare ... It happens." 90

He accepted the primal passion underlying the story as a natural expression of the sexual motive, not as a result of a "superfluous concoction". He thus eliminated the love potion because it turned Tristram and Isolt into "a pair of impossible morons". "Men and women", 91 he said, "can make trouble enough for themselves without being denatured."

Tristram and the two Isolts are not sexual neurotics; they are intelligent, thoughtful people who love with their whole beings and possess the intellectual capacity to contemplate the meaning of their existence. It is the latter quality, the poet infers in a variety of detailed introspections and spoken comments, that elevates primary passion above solely physical experience. Tristram and Isolt of Ireland simply and adulterously fall in love; it 'happens' :

'terror born of passion became passion

Reborn of terror while his lips and hers

Put speech out like a flame put out by fire.' (p.613)

At that moment 'There was no room for time between their souls
And bodies.' (p.614) But, in a typical passage, the author
immediately defines the situation reflectively, according to the
passion - pain - psychological blindness sequence:

'Isolt, almost as with a frightened leap,
Muffled his mouth with hers in a long kiss,
Blending in their catastrophe two fires
That made one fire. When she could look at him
Again, her tears, unwilling still to flow,
Made of her eyes two shining lakes of pain
With moonlight living in them; and she said ...

"You are younger than time says you are,
Or you would not be losing it ...
It is our curse that you were not to see
Until you saw too late." ' (p.616)

The poet did not regard his Arthurian lovers as stereotyped
Romantics, and attempted to reveal them as psychologically valid
beings with minds and wills of their own. Their love is not
'the small, ink-fed Eros' of the artificer.

Different are Robinson's short studies in Puritan psychology.
The New England setting and tradition is generally accepted on
presumption and rarely described for its own sake; "Boston", with
its 'dimness of a charmed antiquity' (p.83), is a rare exception.
"Eros Turannos", in which the wife's loneliness and frustration is
presented metaphorically in terms of a psychically relevant environment,
is more typical.

Repression and reticence are possibly the two most characteristic

components of the Puritan character that the poet analyses.

"John Evereldown" is a clear-cut instance of sexual repression :

"God knows if I pray to be done with it all,

But God is no friend to John Evereldown." (p.74)

"Mortmain" is an unsensational story of the long-rooted repression of a spinster and her at last impatient and exhausted admirer who, having been unsolicited and unconsummated for years, decides on a final visit to expose the unreasonableness of her negation and so provoke, perhaps, a change of heart. Avenal Gray, fifty years of age with gray hair and eyes and the agreeable compensation, her neighbours decide, of a gray cat, is loved by Seneca Sprague. Sprague attempts to free her from her obsessive love for her dead brother. As the title of the poem suggests, her mind and affections are under the unconscious control of the 'undying dead'. Avenal is a mild, and not especially tortured, product of neurotic fixation : all her love is for her dead brother. Seneca observes the child in her, the implication being that her inability to outgrow childish attachment is a symptom of enforced, and finally unnecessary, sexual repression. After telling her that she is "Inseparable from" her "obsession", he says :

"When you find anomalies here

Among your flowers and are surprised at them,

Consider yourself and be surprised again;

For they and their potential oddities

Are all a part of nature. So are you,

Though you be not a part that nature favours,

And Favoring, carries on. You are a monster;

A most adorable and essential monster". (p.893)

The universal symbol is here employed ironically to emphasise biological anomaly. The psychology revealed by Seneca's remark "Anyhow, damn the cat" (p.897) is no less obvious than that of "The Tree in Pamela's Garden" in which the neighbors 'making romance of reticence', believing that 'only in so far As she was in a garden was like Eve,' and

'Seeing that she had never loved a man,

Wished Pamela had a cat, or a small bird ...' (p.576)

"Mortmain" contains an explanation of Seneca's rejection of the "grim God" of "old-fashioned" Puritanism and his belief in the 'implacable and inviolable' laws of nature. The poet comments, however, that Avenal and Seneca are 'a woman and a man At odds with heritage' (p.894), which suggests that Puritanism is at the source of their impoverishment.

(iv)

It would seem fitting to remark, in conclusion, that Robinson's response to Puritanism was critical, intelligent, and progressive.

He seems to have ^{unobtrusively} quietly found himself ^{at} home with certain positive aspects of its philosophy. There is some truth in the assumption that existence is a form of pain and that fortitude is necessary in a man who wishes to avoid the corrupting effects of the Waste Land. The writer adopts this position in "Hillcrest" as he postulates that

'he may never dare again

Say what awaits him, or be sure

What sunlit labyrinth of pain

He may not enter and endure.' (p.16)

Hence, his compassion, arrived at as a result of soul-searching, for those who are fated to endure but are ill equipped to do so. This led to a brand of tolerance and avoidance of condemnation superior to the 'common code', and a belief in the individual right to happiness. From the Puritan and Transcendentalist tradition, augmented by the subjective trend in literature, philosophy, and psychology, Robinson derived the individual basis of behaviour and values. But his critical faculty, his sense of a Purpose and of the importance of ultimate issues, were not drugged. The traditional mythology, including its emotively stimulating demonology, were reconstituted in a psychological framework by the poet, who delved below the surface of action and consciousness. Also appealing to the poet was Emerson's sense of the 'familiar sublime', together with the Puritan inclination towards the simple life and intimacy with its humble aspects. In many of the early poems he attempted a romance of the commonplace, whilst one of his undoubted achievements is his creation of a poetic idiom that preserves the rhythms of ordinary speech within the traditional forms. The Puritan exploration of conscience and advocacy of abnegation have received new impetus and meaning, in line with modern theories of the psyche, in Robinson's poetry. His metapsychology of Revelation, on the other hand, provides a realistic analysis of spiritual pride as well as an awareness of that delusion of grandeur with which the ego is fed by the unconscious mind.

In his early creative years the poet was sensitive to the inhibiting factors of the common 'heritage'. He wished he had a smile that would light up his "semicadaverous countenance",⁹² and

declared that "Selfishness hangs to a man like a lobster"⁹³ that it is unconscious and uncontrollable he affirms on another occasion when he refers to the awkward "bundle of crochets" that "goes to make up my ego".⁹⁴ Occasionally the moralising strain also clung to the poet and expressed itself in epithet and intellectual exegesis.

Robinson, like Hawthorne, dissented from the negativism and oppression of the 'common code'. Hereditary introspection made the poet aware that there were many illusions to be shattered and much psychic fear to be disposed of; and he revealed the rotten^e psychological foundation of negative Puritanism. Also, he exposed many aspects of neurotic Puritanism including the abhorrence of happiness, the hypocritical denunciation of the instincts, sadism and masochistic soul torment, the love of power and prohibition, the craving for material prosperity, the violation of, and opposition to, beauty, the attempt to categorise everything according to right and wrong, the obsession with respectability, the incubus-paranoia. The antitheses of these characteristics would make up a large proportion of Robinson's values.

THE INTROSPECTIVE TRADITION

(1)

Edwin Arlington Robinson's position in modern American literature is not insignificant, partly because he was the first important poet to restore the real flavour of life to poetry following the poetic depression of the late nineteenth century. His status is also enhanced in that he has a sure place in the introspective tradition of modern literature, which is characterised by the reassessment of

reality in terms of the interior life and the revitalisation of symbolism. This psychological trend was pronounced in nineteenth-century American literature and found its most permeable^{nt} expression in the works of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. During the present century it has splintered and multiplied radically and is to be seen in such diverse writers as Robinson Jeffers, Eugene O'Neill, Sherwood Anderson, and William Faulkner.

Robinson belongs rightly between the two groups as successor of the established heritage and forerunner to its more experimental developments. The tradition favoured the growth of the analytic and poetic novel and the displacement of natural process by psychic process as a more revelatory subject for poetry, and he 'belongs' largely because he endeavoured to fuse the advantages of the novel - realism, characterisation, conversation and introspection - with the poetic idiom of blank verse, yet also because of his successful manipulation of traditional forms, lyric, monologue, sonnet etc., to create a poetic world out of human predicaments and psychic facts.

The poet benefited from the later nineteenth century's reinterpretation of man in which the convention of the omnipotent conscious man and the rationality of the superb social being was replaced by a philosophical and literary refocus which recognised the vastness of man's hidden personality over which his intelligence had only transitory and limited control. He also grasped intuitively and imaginatively the new meaning implicit in the revolutionary studies of man's nature and behaviour. As such he participates in the creative reorientation which one critic, who attributes "the greatest influence on contemporary literature" to "the discovery

of the importance of the unconscious", defines as the "attempt to express in imaginative form the various modern discoveries in psychology."⁹⁵ Cestre, whose criticism Robinson admired, says that the poet "profited by the discoveries of the science of the mind, carried in our time to deeper layers of phenomena and more elusive elements of the psychic reality."⁹⁶

A brief examination of Robinson's relation to the introspective tradition in European and American literature is therefore appropriate, for the tradition persists in the attempt of modern poetry to assimilate the psychoanalytical view of man. Robinson, it seems, is an unexpected precursor of such different poets as Yeats, Jeffers, Aiken, Eliot, Auden, Merrill Moore, Edwin Muir, Dylan Thomas, and George Barker.

Formative aspects of the return to the subjective are to be found in Romanticism and the poetic and critical interest in the psychology of imagination which it excited. Coleridge experimented with inspiration and imagination and conceptualised subconscious as well as conscious layers of mental processes in his formulation of literary principles. De Quincey's comparable pursuits led him to explore the realm below the spontaneous consciousness. Romanticism, which absorbed numerous ideas from Neo-Platonism, evolved a concept of a universal Unconscious immanent in Nature. The individualism of Romantic psychology was thus based on the idea of the transcendental soul and, ultimately, on the psychic perfection of the 'One'. The ultra-terrestrial unconscious informed Shelley's love force and Novalis' pan-psychic force; the latter was expressed in images of infinite meaning suggested by the pre-logical suffusions of dream.

Romantic introspection appertained to the philosophical imagination of Emerson and the ratiocinative imagination of Poe.

Although Robinson's psychological realism is anti-Romantic in its specification of introspection and imaginative discipline, his sensitivity to the Ineffable, the ineluctable mystery at the core of existence, is characterised by distinctly impressionistic overtones, and by excursions into symbolism that frequently illumine character yet occasionally vivify his one condoned form of romanticism, romance of the commonplace. The impressionistic principle, 'l'Indécis au Précis se joint', which Verlaine formulated in "Art poétique" is commendably exploited in some of the most memorable lyrics of Robinson, who defended Verlaine in a early sonnet. Memory ('souvenir'), which lent itself to the impressionistic aim and found its expression, for example, in Verlaine's sonnet "Nevermore", induces a combination of psychic indetermination and descriptive precision in one of Robinson's best sonnets, "Souvenir". The impressionistic preference for light, shade, and nuance characterises much of Robinson's poetry and is evident in the poem:

'A vanished house that for an hour I knew
By some forgotten chance when I was young
Had once a glimmering window overhung
With honeysuckle wet with evening dew.
Along the path tall dusky dahlias grew,
And shadowy hydrangeas reached and swung
Ferociously; and over me, among
The moths and mysteries, a blurred bat flew.

Somewhere within there were dim presences
 Of days that hovered and of years gone by.
 I waited, and between their silences
 There was an evanescent faded noise;
 And though a child, I knew it was the voice
 Of one whose occupation was to die.' (p.p.509-10)

The examples of 'l'Indécis au Précis se joint' are quite apparent, of course, but worthy of notice is the beautiful accuracy of 'swing Ferociously', which conveys the towering effect of the hydrangeas upon the child who, presumably, brushed against them in the still and silent dusk. Consonant with this are the discreet use of synaesthesia, here the visualisation of 'noise', and the alloyage of 'house' and psyche, life and death. The last statement conforms with Verlaine's principle and Robinson's idea of "real poetry", which is much the same thing: "you find that something has been said, and yet you find also a sort of nimbus of what can't be said."⁹⁷ The final statement evokes the 'nimbus' for it does not suggest, alone, either the Freudian death instinct or Novalis' notion of creative death. Yet, even in the poetic vagueness of Novalis, as in the philosophical determinism of Hegel, the growth of a psychoanalytical idea is apparent. Novalis writes:

"Life is the beginning of death. Life is for the sake of death. Death is simultaneous end and beginning.

We are near awakening when we dream that we dream.

Life ends like the day and a perfect spectacle,
 sadly - but with sublime hope." 98

Robinson's short studies of the subliminal mind are adroitly woven from impressionistic materials. In "Alma Mater", for example, the poet suggests the nature of unconscious process and observes the elusiveness of inspiration; an unconscious idea that seems to be 'A vision for the gods to verify' may simply 'die' and become 'shapeless' when transformed into consciousness. (p.p.346-7) Such combination of vision and frustration is not uncommon in later nineteenth-century French poetry, particularly the impressionistic synthesis of dream and inner pessimism and the symbolist synthesis of anxiety and mystery, and is founded on one of the basic experiences of the psycho-physical relationships.

Robinson's plain style restricted his use of the more intrepid impressionistic and symbolic techniques, some of the latter of which were formulated by Novalis almost a century before Mallarmé . The symbolism of the blue flower in Novalis' Heinrich von Ofterdingen combines dream and colour in the cultivation of an inner purity. His symbolism, mystery, doctrine of Rhythm, and aesthetic pretension anticipate the Symbolist movement. The German writer's Romanticist ideal that the way to liberation commences with knowledge of the unconscious is barely comparable with the modern version of the idea - introspective realism - which is pronounced in the clinical confessions of Auden's and Robinson's people. Yet elemental configurations remain, especially the basic dualisms and the internalisation of the dualistic process. Novalis asks "is not the universe in us? " and announces that when interior darkness is equalled by interior light and the invisible man is connected with the visible he then becomes aware, in the words of Robinson, of

"the light behind the stars" (p.178), of 'The flame beyond the boundary, the music, The foam and the white ships.' (p.181) The following passage from "Hymns to the Night" by Novalis might well be thought of as a synopsis, in the Romantic idiom, of the metaphysic in Robinson's early volume, The Children of the Night.

"But I turn aside to the holy, unutterable
mysterious night. Far-off lies the world - sunk
into a deep grave - devastated and lonely in its place.
Deep sadness blows through the heart-strings.
Distances of memory, desires of youth, dreams of
childhood, the whole life's brief joys and vain
hopes come in grey clothes, like evening mist
after sunset. In other spaces light beat open
its happy tents. Will it never return to its
children who wait for it in the innocence of their
father? " 99

The Novalis image of man standing "lonely at the meagre hill"
amid "dark space" at the ultimate moment when "the cord of life
was severed", and his fundamental question and answer -

"But where are we going?

Always home." 100 -

are expressions of the same archetype which prompted Robinson's
"The Man Against The Sky". The 'Man' stands upon a burning hill

'As if he were the last god going home
Unto his last desire.' (p.60)

The Romantic exploration of dream inculcated a poetic
sensibility in which values and Time were idealistic representations
of unconscious phenomena. Philosophy rationalised and legitimised

depth-analysis but substituted Negation when it refuted idealism. From the observation of mental processes Bergson ^formulated his concept of time as inward duration experienced ; this involved the interpenetration of feeling and sensation. The dream is the traditional means of revealing this subconscious flux. Robinson's interest in the subconscious mind is frequently revealed in his presentations of dream confusions of space and time and his interpretations of the latent content for the purpose of characterisation. 'The strange and unrememberable light That is in dreams' (p.88) may suggest the penultimate 'devastating light', but more often it simply affords impressionistic setting for the psychological struggle of the individual, as in Amaranth. The youthful "Ballade by the Fire" provides an inconspicuous example of the dream conflux of images. The dreamer by the fire perceives 'tongs and shovel ... grow By grim degrees to pick and spade.' (p.77) In "Isaac and Archibald", however, dream elements are deftly worked into a Bergsonian pattern of sensations that makes the inner experiences of the boy undoubtedly true to life.

'The present and the future and the past,
Isaac and Archibald, the burning hush,
The Trojans and the walls of Jericho,
Were beautifully fused ...'¹⁰¹ (p.179)

What is erudite and intended to evoke the medium of pure philosophical experience in T.S.Eliot's "Burnt Norton", which begins

'Time present and Time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past,'¹⁰²

is unpretentious but ^{not} unmistakably poetic in "Isaac and Archibald."

The stylistic mannerism whereby plain speech is unobtrusively heightened by such Symbolic concepts as flower symbolism, Mallarmé's symphonic blue and Novalis' "blue flood" of interstellar movement, and synaesthesia (Robinson's 'accusing voice of color') is evident in the following passage, from "Mortmain", which contemplates the painful insignificance of human desire - even "kindliness becomes ... A strangling and unwilling incubus" - when compared with the supernal essence:

'He watched her face and waited, but she gave him
 Only a baffled glance before there fell
 So great a silence there among the flowers
 That even their fragrance had almost a sound;
 And some that had no fragrance may have had,
 He fancied, an accusing voice of color
 Which her pale cheeks now answered with another;
 Wherefore he gazed a while at tiger-lilies
 Hollyhocks, dahlias, asters and hydrangeas -
 The generals of an old anonymous host
 That he knew only by their shapes and faces.
 Beyond them he saw trees ; and beyond them
 A still blue summer sky where there were stars
 In hiding, as there might somewhere be veiled
 Eternal reasons why the tricks of time
 Were played like this. Two insects on a leaf
 Would fill about as much of nature's eye,
 No doubt, as would a woman and a man

At odds with heritage. Yet there they sat,
 A woman and a man beyond the range
 Of all deceit and all philosophy
 To make them less or larger than they were.
 The sun might only be a spark among

Superior stars, but one could not help that.' (p.p.893-4)

But the plain logic of such passages, which occur relatively frequently in the longer pieces, does not always conceal an avoidance of the logical conclusions of psychological analysis. The restraint of Impressionistic effects - paleness, languid water-colours, flower images, tension between dream and inner disquiet, deflation - occasioned by the idiomatic simplicity of such expressions as 'one could not help that' while being technically purposeful, does not necessarily compensate for the dissolution of form or displacement of immediate interest. Such poetic indulgence points to a problem of sensibility which Robinson did not solve in the longer poems and which many twentieth century poets deliberately shun.

(11)

E.A. Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry James have esteemed and scatheless places in the American tradition. In fact, they may be said to constitute a literary assuetude: an introspective tradition. The technical and narrative components of their work blended in forms appropriate to their Gothic, ontogenetic and phylogenetic themes. They diagnosed the psyche in its search for identities on the inward side of the dark glass, the soul-feeling

of cosmic vertigo (the master explorations of this theme are Poe's Narrative of A. Gordon Pym and Melville's Moby Dick), and the exigencies of private relationships that revolve around inter-lapping consciousness and tenebrific perturbations. The "texture" of Robinson's poetry, Conrad Aiken declares, can be seen "as we can see the subtle texture of Henry James, or of Hawthorne, as a product peculiarly American - the over-sensitiveness of the sensitive soul in an environment where sensitiveness is rare." 103

Twentieth century American literature has not dispossessed itself of this tradition, and modern poetry has found a fortunate purveyor of it in E.A. Robinson.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's relation to the tradition is much less important, although his philosophic method was introspective... His thinking and poetry centred around an emblematic affinity of mind and nature, spirit and matter, microcosm and macrocosm, and his epistemology was derived from intuition and the collective unconscious, which he regarded as the true springs of intellectual, physical and spiritual nourishment. The human organism, in Emerson's view, reached the status of universal referent and the soul achieved a degree of self-consciousness. Unlike Poe, Hawthorne, James and Robinson, Emerson's subjective approach to life endorsed values as extroverted expressions of the mind. None of the four writers would themselves have felt the assurance of Emerson when he wrote: "So is there no fact, no event, in our private history, which shall not, sooner or later, lose its adhesive, inert form, and astonish us by soaring from our body into the empyrean." 104 They knew the unworthiness, the devilment, the horrific triviality of many private facts and

events which they detected, but Emerson could not, in the neuropathic darkness. Poe expressed a life-long series of frustrations that precluded him, but not always his alter-ego, from such a place in the Empyrean, and Robinson perceived the devil in the sun. Robinson came closest to the Emersonian vision, for he never lost his youthful transcendental apprehension ('there comes an onward phrase to me Of some transcendent music I have heard' - p.108); but the early mystical mannerism of Emily Brontë was superseded by his native, ironical regard of the transcendental. It is Captain Craig, not the poet, who announces the Emersonian, Oriental vision of flight to the Empyrean; Robinson remembered Icarus.

In Emerson's world 'The conscious stone to beauty grew'. With his intuition he might 'aim a telescope at the inviolate sun'. He did not know the headlines of a future era when science was to change society and man's knowledge of himself and the outer world, the knowledge that Robinson reviewed with customary irony:

'The sun might only be a spark among

Superior stars, but one could not help that.' (p.894)

Emersonian man needed to rise above his egocentric self and yield to the primal senses, the archetypal images, the collective unconscious in himself and nature. 'I yielded myself to the perfect whole', wrote the poet. ¹⁰⁵ The 'perfect whole' was synthesised and reconciled oneness of movement, time, space, emotion, and intellect : 'the subtle ways' of eternal return, the simultaneous actuality of 'far' and 'near', the equivalence of place ('abode')

and morality ('good'), the sameness of 'Shadow and sunlight', the humble equality of 'shame and fame', the indivisibility of intellect and object of thought. At least, such is the perfect vision as Emerson found it revealed to him in "Brahma", his stupendous mement.

Emerson's divergence from the introspective tradition is exemplified in his psychology of dreams, which is based upon admission and transcendence - admission of the Freudian reality that is in turn changed into transcendental reality. Emerson's view that dreams were an expression of darkness and disclosed private demons was shared by Robinson. Emerson wrote:

"The demonologic is only a fine name for egotism; an exaggeration namely of the individual ... Dreams retain the infirmities of our character. The good genius may be there or not, our evil genius is sure to stay. The Ego partial makes the dream; the Ego total the interpretation. Life is also a dream on the same terms." 106

The philosophic ease with which Emerson reversed the synecdoche is not to be found in Robinson, who grimly and ironically observed the inability of numerous people to move from 'Ego partial' to 'Ego total'. King Jasper, with the monster of his ills upon his back, leapt across the chasm only to find that the promised peace was a mirage and to be stabbed by a malignant knife before falling into colder darkness. Yet such is not always the fate. Amaranth tells Atlas :

"Many awake to learn that they are born
Out of a dream."

(p.1369)

Amaranth and King Jasper were timely reminders that the American Nightmare, the horrida bella of the soul and Nemesis of the introspective tradition, persisted with increasing wrath in the America of the 'thirties. Harry Levin observes, in The Power of Blackness, that the most persuasive themes in classic American literature express the peculiarly American dilemma - the nightmare reality of human alienation. He discerns the dilemma to have been expressed in relation to four archetypal forms - an extraordinary journey, a house of illusions, a homeless man or alter-ego, a dream or nightmare.

The Nightmare, with accents of Poe and Hawthorne, finds its way into Robinson's poetry. The journeys and excursions of Robinson's characters most often reflect the psychic plight of their hapless minds as they meander through spiritual deserts of their own being. The divided self plagued by an incubus is not only a common Robinsonian formula, as characterisations like Malory, Nightingale, Avon, Nash and others aver, but is also an elemental form that found its expression in Gothic and introspective literature of the nineteenth century. It appears in the pseudo-scientific horror of Fitz-James O'Brien, on the one hand, and in the feverish verse of James Thomson, on the other. The English poet's "The City of Dreadful Night", from which the following stanza is taken, is an example of the hallucinated journey :

'As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : I was twain,
Two selves distinct that cannot join again;
One stood apart and knew but could not stir,

And she watched the other stark in swoon and her;

And she came on and never turned aside,

Between such sun and moon and roaring tide:

And as she came more near

My soul grew mad with fear.' 107

Robinson records the nightmare journey, exemplified by "The Flying Dutchman" who 'steers himself away from what is haunted By the old ghost of what has been before' (p.473), in a variety of instances. "The Return of Morgan and Fingal" is a poem about the crossing of stormy water in the dark of night, and combines legend, fantasy, mystery, and death; "Cortege" is a 'crazy tune' that sings the journey to death and "Bon Voyage" presents the suicidal aspect of the same tune; "The Klondike" presents the dark side of history and materialism; "The Flying Dutchman" symbolised the doomed pursuit of materialism; "The Town Down The River" is an allegorical journey; Roman Bartholow prepares to travel the world in search of wisdom; Tristram journeys between Eros and Death, Merlin and Lancelot between Eros, Duty and the Grail; Fargo tours the Unconscious and the displaced regions of the lost.

The long poems provide an impressive list of homeless men: Captain Craig, Benn-Raven, Nash, Cavender, Malory, Timberlake. Such men are variously estranged by love and hate, poverty and temperament.

Cavender's House delineates most aspects of the Nightmare : guilt, mental horror, perpetual night, accusing ghosts, internal blackness, years of homeless wandering, a house of illusions where

darkness is relieved only by haunting moonlight, isolation, psychic conflict. The opening lines of the poem achieve a synthesis of the main literary elements that have constituted the introspective tradition since 1824 when William Austin's story of Peter Rugg was first published:

'Into that house where no man went, he went
 Alone; and in that house where day was night,
 Midnight was like a darkness that had fingers.
 He felt them holding him as if time's hands
 Had found him; and he waited as one waits
 Hooded for death, and with no fear to die.
 It was not time and dying that frightened him,
 Nor was it yet the night that was around him,
 That others not himself were not to know.
 He stood by the same door that he had closed
 Twelve years ago, and waited; and again
 He closed the door, slowly and silently,
 And was himself a part of darkness there,
 There in his own dark house.' (p.961)

Nightmare is manifested on separate psychic planes. Robinson contemplates man's place in the cosmic mind in such sonnets as "The Dead Village", "Credo", and "Supremacy"; he invokes the past as a kind of racial memory in such poems as "Stafford's Cabin", "The House on the Hill", and "The Tavern"; and he explores the fixated ego's quest for control of the dynamic present in poems like King Jasper. The cosmic nightmare is conveyed in the obscurity that enshrouds man's 'born estate' on 'life's little star'. (p.97) The racial nightmare is

represented by mysterious and unpunished crime that is
unforgotten while the anguished ghosts of murdered men like
Ham Amory haunt old habitats, and by images of 'ruin and decay' ...

'There is ruin and decay

In the House on the hill;

They are all gone away,

There is nothing more to say.'

The personal nightmare haunts a man like Nightingale whose long
awaited mansion proves to be a mausoleum, or like Jasper whose
power is usurped and broken as a result of guilt, remorse, and
retribution.

The "voice from the crowd" in William Austin's story
"Peter Rugg, The Missing Man" told Rugg: "Time, which destroys
and renews all things, has dilapidated your house, and placed us
here. You have suffered many years under an illusion ... Your
home is gone, and you can never have another home in this world." 108
The ^aArchetypal prophecy and the symbolic identification of house
or home with psyche or soul points to a line of thought that
reappears in Poe, Hawthorne, and Robinson.

Poe's story "The Fall of the House of Usher" develops symbolic
parallels between house and human being. The "House of Usher",
like the "House of the Seven Gables", resembles the human organism;
the dark tarn suggests the mind, especially dream and unconscious
aspects; and the fissure, the fatal dislocation represents the
destruction of the psychic being. Poe describes a disordered
brain in "The Haunted Palace" in which he invokes the racial memory's

'dim remembered story Of the old time entombed.' Robinson's romance of the commonplace and melodramatic remembrances invite comparison with Poe's subliminal exploits. "Stafford's Cabin" which begins

'Once there was a cabin here, and once there was a man,

And something happened here before my memory began.' (p.14)

is an example. Poe's horror, a method of inquiring into states of mind, probably has some literary bearing on Robinson's presentation of it, examples of which are to be found in Avon's Harvest and The Man Who Died Twice. Poe's disturbed consciousness and cosmological mental darkneses are rivalled by Robinson's psychotic symbols, among which are a variety of unseen enemies, presences, hands, and fingers that strangle the peace of mind of such characters as Briony and Honoria. Poe's investigation of the split psyche (for example the doppelgänger fantasy in "William Wilson") has been superseded by Robinson's more realistic analysis of differentiated minds.

In stories like "Ligeia" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" Poe employs a method of first person confession which, like that of Henry James, reveals the narrator's intentional story, on one level, and his unintentional yet unconsciously meaningful story, on another level. This kind of psychic revelation under conditions of emotional stress and mental disturbance is reproduced with great skill in many of Robinson's dramatic lyrics. "The Clinging Vine" illustrates the psychological quality of the method in a fairly straight forward manner. The plight of the hysterical wife can

be deduced from her tirade against her husband, which begins

"Be calm? And was I frantic?

You'll have me laughing soon.

I'm calm as this Atlantic,

And quiet as the moon;

I may have spoken faster

Than once, in other days;

For I've no more a master,

And now - 'Be calm', he says." (p.8)

It is generally agreed that Hawthorne and Robinson have in common such qualities as reticence, contemplation, austerity, an awareness of interrelated past and present, and a psychological interest in morality, conscience, the unconscious, and Puritan repression. Hence it is not difficult to find examples of Hawthorne's prose that suggest to the reader of Robinson instant parallels with that poet. The comparison is most striking when reference is made to some of Hawthorne's most introspective passages, such as the following from "The Haunted Mind" :

"In the depths of every heart, there is a tomb and a dungeon, though the lights, the music, and revelry above may cause us to forget their existence, and the buried ones, or prisoners whom they hide. But sometimes, these dark receptacles are flung wide open ... then pray that your griefs may slumber, and the brotherhood of remorse not break their chain. It is too late ! A funeral train comes gliding by your bed, in which Passion and Feeling assume bodily

shape ... the devils of a guilty heart, that holds its hell within itself. What if Remorse should assume the features of an injured friend? What if the fiend should come in woman's garments, with a pale beauty amid sin and desolation, and lie down by your side? ... Sufficient without such guilt is the nightmare of the soul; this heavy, heavy sinking of the spirits; this wintry gloom about the heart; this indistinct horror of the mind, blending itself with the darkness of the chamber." 109

The introspective quality of the above writing, its imagistic relationship of below and above, also prevalent in Poe's poetry, the dark unconscious world of demon, fiend, incubus, succubus, and sexual uneasiness - are the elements which contribute to the image patterns in Robinson's longer poems.

"The Christmas Banquet" is another story from Twice-Told Tales which points to the comparability of themes in the two writers. Hawthorne's story describes an assortment of failures and derelicts akin to those portrayed by Robinson, whilst the central character's failure is remarkably duplicated in "Tasker Norcross". Hawthorne describes Gervase Hastings as a person "conscious of the deficiency in his spiritual organization". Ferguson, according to his description of Norcross, imagines himself in a similar light and might well have been expected to remark, in the words of Hastings, "I have possessed nothing, neither joys nor griefs".

The most pronounced similarity between the two New Englanders, however, is less particular but more ineffable. It is to be seen in their common grasp of clinical situation, and their subtle use of house symbolism to indicate states of mind and facets of personality.

The art of Henry James, directed inwards in the manner of the introspective writer, suggests points of contact with that of Robinson. The artistic milieu of their compatability includes a number of literary qualities which both facilitate and result from their interest in psychological problems. Perhaps the following are the foremost of these mutual qualities: the priority of intellectual and imaginative activity over scene; the primacy of the private life of desire, frustration, and revelation below the surface of polite appearance; the often blurred boundary between fantasy and reality; the recurrent use of dream images and symbols of states of mind; the thematic significance of horror that has its origin in the unconscious; the individual's agonised awareness of his isolation and the emphasis on self-reliance; the use of techniques to capture interior thoughts; conversations that echo the incommunicable and the unspoken; perception of the moral significance of things and a belief in the virtue of suffering generously.

As in the case of Hawthorne, it is impossible for the reader of Robinson to peruse James without encountering passages that corroborate the introspective kinship of the authors. The person, shape, or soul grasping darkly in the fear that he has not really

lived is the introspective archetype of the Robinsonian man, and it is not inappropriate that he should be met, face to face, in the work of Robinson's great contemporary: James writes ...

"Since it was in Time that he was to have met his fate, so it was in Time that his fate was to have acted; and as he waked up to the sense of no longer being young, which was exactly the sense of being stale, just as that, in turn, was the sense of being weak, he waked up to another matter beside. It all hung together; they were subject, he and the great vagueness, to an equal and indivisible law. When the possibilities themselves had, accordingly, turned stale, when the secret of the gods had grown faint, had perhaps even quite evaporated, that, and that only, was failure. It wouldn't have been failure to be bankrupt, dishonoured, pilloried, ^{to} hanged; it was failure not be anything. And so, in the dark valley into which his path had taken its unlooked-for twist, he wondered not a little as he groped." 110

THE HOUSE OF THE PSYCHE

E.A. Robinson's 'craft and sullen art' was severe. It demanded a great deal of technical patience and labour and grew out of an exhausting vortex of introspective imaginings. The poet's "mood for work", as he explained to Mason, was a matter of "studying the ceiling and my navel for four hours then writing

down perhaps four lines." ¹¹¹ Such a mood reflects not only his New England propensity for soul-searching and self-recrimination but also his process of 'delving' and conjecture concerning the psychic being and the conduct of humans in real or imagined situations.

Out of such moods Robinson created his psychological method, which is primarily a way of allowing a situation to evolve according to the unconscious motives of the people involved in the situation, and of showing what happens when one or more of the characters become aware of the hidden implications. His own account of the method, contained in a letter to Bates which discusses his play Van Zorn, is in substance the sort of account which might have been expected from James. He wrote :

"Van Zorn is supposed to believe that he 'found his destiny' in Villa Vannevar, but finds in Act II that he has been working unconsciously for Lucas, who is equally ignorant of what is going on. Villa knows by this time that Van Zorn is in love with her, and this fact, together with the realization that she is going to get Lucas after all, and through the unconscious sacrifice of a man who would probably have got her himself, if Lucas hadn't been in the way, shakes her up considerably ... The play is for the most part the working of character upon character, the plot being left, more or less, to reveal itself by inference." ¹¹²

Van Zorn, like Doctor Quick, may be described crudely as an amateur psychoanalyst who envisages that his role is one of skilful indirection whereby a course of events, which he regards as inevitable, is afforded its best attainable, and soonest possible, fruition. Both the play and Talifer expound the nowadays popular thesis that the most favourable condition for a harmonious love relationship is achieved once the protagonists become devoutly aware of their unconscious attitudes and motives. To act according to blind will or mere irrational response is, in Robinson's view, often the sure path to tragedy ... a race toward libidinous suicide as the poet suggests in "The Whip". He sees a valid love as a conscious responsibility, not a promiscuous mysticism.

Van Zorn presents the problem of human unhappiness within the environs of a clinical situation. Van Zorn expresses the opinion that much unhappiness is, "from the finite point of view", "unnecessary".¹¹³ Villa, by understanding the truth about her inner love feelings, is in a position to avoid unhappiness. Thus Van Zorn, endeavouring to help free her unconscious will, asks: "Is it your unalterable will to deprive three people, including yourself, of the happiness that might as well be theirs?" (p.108) He employs darkness as an image of psychological blindness to suggest that such deprivation leads to "long roads that lie in darkness."

In his play, Van Zorn, Robinson presented the two main psychological issues which he had raised, and was to continue to

problems to arise, in the poetry: the problem of identity and happiness, especially in the love relationships; and the problem of self-knowledge.

Perhaps the first issue is mainly expressed as a psychology of sexual conflict that is almost Strindbergian in its consideration of mental agony. Not only a theme in many of the long poems, it is the main subject of such short poems as "The Clinging Vine", "John Gorham", "Eros Taranos", "The Unforgotten", and "London Bridge". There appear to be two main justifications (other than purely literary) for the preponderance of unhappiness in love in Robinson's poetry: first, the sociological fact that the divorce rate reached gigantic proportions in the United States during the poet's lifetime and was symptomatic of a major social problem; second, the psychiatric fact that mental disorder, often traceable to injurious or amorphous love relationships, became prevalent in the complex, modern age in which overwhelming demands have been made upon the power of reason.

One American writer produces figures to show that "friction in the marital relationship was widespread." :

"Between the Civil War and the end of the Gilded Age, that is between 1865 and 1890, the number of divorces for a given unit of population exactly doubled, and by 1906 more than 72,000 decrees of separation were handed down annually - a figure twice as large as that reported in the same year from the rest of the Christian world ...

To a people baffled by frustration and disharmony the teachings of Strindberg had at least a plausibility, and in the decade

just before they turned to Freud, they gave to his analysis of feminine psychology an attentive ear." 114

Jung writes :

"The desymbolized world of the Protestant has produced first an unhealthy sentimentality and then a sharpening of the moral conflict logically leading, because of its unbearableness, to Nietzsche's "beyond good and evil". In the centres of civilization, this condition shows itself also in the increasing insecurity of marriage." 115

Following the influence of philosophic pessimism and Hartmann's contributions to the psychology of the unconscious, the literary reaction against factitious Victorianism and surrogate Romanticism incited the theoretical and experimental originality of the new literature, above all, the advances made in psychological realism. Naturalism, which purported to provide art with a firm scientific and objective basis, represented the psychological interplay between heredity and environment. Robinson perceived the vitality of the new realism, which he injected into some of his earliest poems, and viewed the human life-cycle according to modern criteria, just as he regarded the scope and purpose of poetry - its aesthetic - as a response to therapeutic, cathartic, and humanitarian ideals. Queried about his "message", the poet once replied:

"I suppose that a part of it might be described as a faint hope of making a few of us understand our fellow creatures a little better, and to realize what a small difference there is after all between

ourselves as we are and ourselves not only as
 we might have been but would have been if our
 physical and temperamental make-up and our
 environment had been a little different." 116

This attitude clearly informs such a short sketch as "The Growth of Lorraine", and stimulates lengthy discussions in such long poems as Roman Bartholow and Talifer. Nor is the poet loth to use his terminology in a purely unadulterated fashion ; addressing Theophilus the poet remarks: 'in you, it seems, Heredity outshines environment.' (p.39)

Robinson's many stories of 'wrong relationships', recalling Hardy and Meredith, sometimes mirror situations which had often been derived from a rendering of Naturalistic principles. But more often the stories of ill-fated love are the result of his own observations and speculations and his attempt to incorporate the clinical details of a story within his peculiarly oblique, and often ironic, frame of implicit meaning. Brown refers to the poet's intellectual method of making a thing "clear by discovering if it were not a part of something more inclusive." What the poet "wanted to know", he affirms, "was the inclusive story behind the appearances - the story behind this man's or that woman's conduct." This ability to tell 'the inclusive story' is, we are told in "Ben Jonson Entertains a Man from Stratford", one of the qualities that made Shakespeare great :

'He knows how much of what men paint themselves
 Would blister in the light of what they are ...
 He knows too much of what the world has hushed
 In others, to be loved now for himself ...' (p.p.27-28)

Brown gives an example of Robinson's power of "psychopathic" diagnosis with regard to a prominent New York woman whose story, once explained, became "a symbol ready-to-hand for one of his poems." 117

Robinson's inclusive stories often demonstrate one form or another of unrealised love. The central issue in human relationships results from the tendency, aided by repression, towards self-isolation, and from the alarming lack of insight which people display in their understanding of others - especially that of one sex for another. Captain Craig's most relevant philosophy comes from the realisation that

"there is more of unpermitted love

In most men's reticence than most men think." (p.155)

This stress upon the unconscious mind is referred to, earlier in the poem, in the image of "the smooth white paper" that "gives no sign Till science brings it out". (p.131) It is not surprising, therefore, that the poet had expressed his interest in psychological matters prior to Captain Craig. He was sensitive to the "unseen force" underlying human attitudes, and declared, on one hand, "the majority of mankind interest me only as studies", and, on the other, that "There is more in every person's soul than we think."¹¹⁸ "We all live in a world of our own and wonder what it is to others", he wrote on another occasion. 119

Robinson's achievement as a psychological poet lies in his capacity to record such observations in simple poetic utterance and to reveal the unconscious undertones of character within a dramatic or lyrical situation. Jane Wayland tells John Gorham, "Somewhere in me there's a woman, if you know the way to find her." (p.14)

In "Lisette and Eileen" the poet describes, with subtle indirection, the sexual frustration underlying twisted emotions. The house of the psyche is thus seen to be shuttered and gloomy in many instances of unrealised love; inside the erotic emotions enact 'a fireside farce.' The poet consistently points out that a state of darkness - for example, that occasioned by ill-fated love - often has its origin in an earlier state of self-deception. Unconscious of the duplicity which the irrational may work upon him, 'Man's habit is to feel before he sees'. (p.464) The man in "The Unforgiven" married without realising his partner's shortcomings and she 'hates him More for her lack than her loss'. (p.38) Bates reports that Robinson referred to the essential quality of his work as "his habit of understatement, his absorption in the unconscious and semi-conscious feelings and impulses of his characters",¹²⁰ and most of his characters therefore require a great deal of sympathetic attention on the part of the reader. Otherwise

'You will not see the drama of dead lives

That are behind calm faces and closed doors.' ¹²¹

This emphasis on the psychical frame of reference is so intrinsic in Robinson's work that conventional realism is often dispensed with, even in such simple descriptions as that of Bewick Finzer,

'Familiar as an old mistake,

And futile as regret.' (p.56)

In some of the more complex short studies, however, the psychical frame of reference provides the 'inclusive' key to the

poem's meaning. The problem of self-knowledge is at the heart of the most introspective of these, and involves the inner processes - images and ideas thrust up from the unconscious - of the psychic being. Robinson mostly avoided the far-reaching disintegration of consciousness. A less fortunate revealer of depth experience, Dylan Thomas, has defined the introspective process in the following statement:

"Whatever is hidden should be made naked ...

Poetry, recording the stripping of the individual darkness, must, inevitably, cast light upon what has been hidden for too long, and, by so doing, make clean the naked exposure. Freud cast light on a little of the darkness he had exposed. Benefiting by the sight of the light and the knowledge of the hidden nakedness, poetry must drag further into the clean nakedness of light more even of the hidden causes than Freud could realise".¹²²

Robinson often used the symbolism of depth, light, and darkness in such psychological terms. On one occasion he informed a correspondent:

"I have my own paint-pots to dabble with. Blacks and grays and browns and blues for the most part - but also a trick, I hope, of letting the white come through in places." ¹²⁴

Most of his works, according to his definition of purpose in Van Zorn, are

"supposed to open or partly open all sorts of trap doors and windows that will give people glimpses into their own cellars and dooryards, and incidentally a fairly good view of the sun, moon and stars."

But the Vision may be fraught with uncertainty and obscurity.

In "Alma Mater" the poet writes :

'When had I known him? And what brought him here?
Love, warning, malediction, hunger, fear?
Surely I never thwarted such as he? -
Again, what soiled obscurity was this:
Out of what scum, and up from what abyss,
Had they arrived - these rags of memory? ' (p.347)

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C h a p t e r 2

OBSCURITY, SCIENCE, AND PSYCHOLOGY.

Poets, whatever the end,
Should know a little more than most of us
Of our obscurities.

- From Amaranth

science is not the summa of life.

- C.G.JUNG

we must learn
Of our defects and doubts, however they hurt.

- From Cavender's House

(1)

Sir Thomas Browne has said that there are obscurities too deep for reason and man should be content, at best, to sit down with his adumbrations. Such an attitude assumes the alienation of the finite mind from the infinite being, and leads to a necessary sense of individuality. Man recognizes his individuality to be imposed by his consciousness, accomplished by his will, and founded upon his personal 'wholeness'. ('Wholeness' refers to "the indivisible unit or 'whole man'", and the process whereby this is achieved has been named by Jung as the process of individuation.¹) The inevitable condition of individuality is ultimately a state of being alone. All of Robinson's major characters have this state thrust upon them, and what happens to them,

eventually, largely depends upon their reaction to it: their reaction, so to speak, is their fate. However, they react in the obscure and complex world of psychic nature, and Robinson's clarification of their fate is an index of his revelation of this world. Matthias, for instance, was forced to have a good look at his adumbrations after his egoistic and hitherto self-sufficient domain of terrestrial and marital possession had crumbled, and he had to be alone to do it :

'He was alone -

Alone as he supposed no other man
 Was ever alone before. He had read books
 About the foiled and the unsatisfied,
 Who should have had more sense, and he had known
 Many, like Gerth, who had succumbed and fallen
 Rather than work and climb. But never before
 Had he perceived among the foiled and fallen
 An adumbration of one like himself,
 And would not yet perceive it.' (p.1114)

But he does perceive it, alone, during the process of individuation, and he perceives the soulless inadequacy of purely defensive, 'terrestrial exigencies'.

It is because Robinson's vision of humanity assumes the primary loneliness of the individual, that he places such characteristic emphasis on the necessity of self-knowledge. The Robinsonian character often has nothing but his own thoughts

and emotions for company, and these are frequently the enemies he must subdue in order to live, instead of negating his life. That is why the description of Umphraville (surely one of the loneliest of men) as 'Socratic, unforgettable, grotesque, Inscrutable and alone' (p.736) is one that, with the possible omission of 'grotesque', suits so many of Robinson's major characters. Penn-Raven encourages Bartholow to accept his "doom ... to see, and see alone;" (p.825) Cavender, once he had subdued the nightmare of his past, 'was alone, And he was best alone'. (p.1006) Robinson's pinnacle, or 'tower', of self-hood is that which Jung extols as

"the highest and most decisive experience of all, which is to be alone with his own self, or whatever else one chooses to call the objectivity of the psyche. The patient must be alone if he is to find out what it is that supports him when he can no longer support himself. Only this experience² can give him an indestructible foundation."

Timberlake informs Natalie that "Half the grief of living is our not seeing what's not to be Before we see too well." (p.1109) In this manner Robinson's characters delve into the darkness of their motives and impulses and grapple with their fate. They are the 'failed and fallen' who, with their mis-spent passions, their blindnesses, obscurities, adumbrations, provide the psychological text for most of the long poems. Six of these poems form the basis of the ~~second~~ ^{first} ~~three~~ ^{first} chapters. They are : Roman Bartholow (1923), The Man Who Died Twice (1924), Cavender's House, (1929),

The Glory of the Nightingales (1930), Matthias at the Door (1931), Amaranth (1934). The following persons are involved, respectively: (1) Roman Bartholow, Gabrielle (his wife), Penn-Raven, Umphraville; (2) Fernando Nash, the narrator; (3) Cavender, Laramie (a projection of his dead wife); (4) Malory, Nightingale; (5) Matthias, Natalie (his wife), Timberlake, Garth; (6) Fargo, and the dream characters - Amaranth, Evensong, Figg, Dr. Styx, Rev. Flax, Pink, Atlas, Elaine Amelia Watchman, Ampersandⁿ, Ipswich, grave-diggers.

These poems and characters are studies of psychological obscurity. The poems have many common characteristics among which psychological interests, such as introspection, the unconscious, the anatomy of the mental personality, the soul, lone human relationships, dreams, hallucinations, neuroses, symbolism, and individuation, rate very highly. The settings of Cavender's House and Amaranth are entirely psychical, and that of The Man Who Died Twice, which is a confession of intense psychological and artistic experiences, predominantly psychical. The other three narratives have natural settings and deal more fully with human relationships. Yet each of these contains confessions of intricate self-analysis, and large sections of The Glory of the Nightingales and Matthias at the Door revert to the psychological setting so thoroughly, that the natural world (for example, the sea of fate in the former and the gorge of death in the latter) is perceived in terms of symbols of the utmost psychical significance.

The rational tone of the verse reflects the intellectuality of the characters, as well as the poet's attempt to restore rational harmony in a chaos of doubt, fear, and irrationality; or failing that, to give excursive reasons why man should, or should not, quit the chaos of this world for the obscurity of the next. Robinson's rational, and often whimsical, imagination is reflected in his evocation of the mists that enshroud the several ways, many of which prove to be cul-de-sacs, along which 'a soul grasping in its loneliness' endeavours to find a way out of life's miasmatic delusion.

(11)

There is a dual approach to obscurity in Robinson's poetry; firstly a conception of man's ignorance of what Henry James denoted as 'the great obscure' of objective or infinite reality; and, secondly and more importantly, a conception of obscurity in psychological relation to subjective phenomena. Robinson, in his poetry, does not appear to have been disposed in the least to the mystical aspiration towards personal and direct communion with God, or to the romantic comprehension of infinite Nature. He steadfastly declined to confuse objective and subjective experiences. Thus, Barnard is probably correct in defining Robinson's outlook in the following way:

"the concept of freedom is ultimately unintelligible...
the universe is basically nonrational, beyond the grasp
of our finite faculties. We need not conclude that it

is chaotic, but we must acknowledge that it is full of mysteries, many of which are painful. As Annandale says with unforseeing irony,

"God has been very good to him

Whose end is not an asking why."

Robinson feels that there is a partial answer; but it is one that the individual must find for himself, if at all, and that cannot be put into words. Penn-Raven is clearly speaking for the past when he says,

"There are these things,

And they are so - until we give them names,

And harness them with words that have one meaning

For no two men; and likelier none at all

For one man - or one woman."

... a partial solution is possible by distinguishing between events and actions ... and states of mind ...

Obviously a person is often involved in situations which he cannot control. Not to mention what the law calls "acts of God" (events always morally meaningless and usually calamitous), there are the wills of other persons, as we see in Robinson's many pictures of blasted romance and blighted marriage." ³

Robinson declared that "nothing of an infinite nature can be proven or disproven in finite terms - meaning words - and the rest is probably a matter of one's individual ways of seeing and feeling things." ⁴ Knowledge of 'the great obscure' is therefore 'incommunicable' : it is 'an orient Word that will not

be erased, Or save in incommunicable gleams ... Be found or known'. 'Eternity records Too vast an answer for the time - born words We spell.' ⁵ Gerth tells Matthias, in answer to questions about the immortal soul, that man's attempt 'to circumnavigate Infinity' 'With a few finite and unfinished words That are the chips of brief experience' is ridiculous. The human mind is surely prevented from delving deep into this obscurity; it is indeed gratifying if "a little intelligence and human understanding", often "the result of trouble and pain", can achieve so much as saving persons from being "unendurable in their abundant ignorance". ⁶ Occasionally, however, some of Robinson's characters, in admitting the obscurity of 'the great obscure', can recommend it. Doctor Quick tells Althea, God's laws

"are said

To be obscure; yet my belief in them
Uncovers them, and sees them occupied
Not far from where we live." ⁷

And Zoe tells King Jasper:

" I don't say what God is, but it's a name
that somehow answers us when we are driven
To feel and think how little we have to do
With what we are." ⁸

Robinson's central preoccupation, however, was not the obscurity of God but the obscurity of 'God's too fallible image.' The obscurity of man presents two main aspects, psychologically: instinctual and personal ; transcending and archetypal. There are human obscurities and differences due to heredity, biology and

environment; and obscurities, symbolized by such words as 'fate', 'time', 'soul', 'life', 'death', 'lone' etc. that are felt intensely as psychic phenomena somehow controlling human behaviour and destiny. In speaking of psychological obscurity, therefore, we may distinguish arbitrarily the fate of the psyche, and the fate of the whole being.

So far as the fate of the psyche is concerned, the poet has related obscurity to three important categories : the unconscious, intuition, and intellect.

The unconscious is referred to as an obscurity of inner darkness and examples are quite common. Nash in his search for coherence and identity experienced

'a coming wonder of surprise

For a new clearness which had late begun

To pierce forbidden chambers long obsured ⁹

Within him, and abandoned, being so dark

And empty that he would not enter them - ' (p.942)

Matthias, transported to psychic reality, is told of the inspirational voice of the subconscious inner light:

"All voices are one voice, with many tongues

To make it inexpressible and obscure

To us until we hear the voice itself." (p.p.1149-50)

Bartholow tells Gabrielle - who says she is 'an ignoramus of the soul' - of the 'weight' her 'soul is bearing ... in its obscurity.'

(p.746) Laramie has the "privilege" of her "obscurities" in the dark of Cavender's mind, and has "a right to blind" him with her "mysteries". (p.991)

The obscurity of intuition is a cloud on the mental horizons of most of Robinson's characters. Bartholow, for example, is plagued in his 'assured renaissance' by 'an obscure monition' (p.735), or fear, that he may still have a 'buried emptiness, like that wherein His endless and indignant yesterdays Had held him.' (p.736)

The intellectual faculty often operates in obscurity; there is an 'obscurity' in Nash's 'reasoning' as there is in that of many another character. The difficulty of rational explication provides a further instance. Bartholow remarks sarcastically to Penn-Raven:

"If there's an idiom that will undulate
Across your meditation less obscurely
Than mine, you might announce another cue
For me to follow ... " (p.816)

The fate of the whole being is frequently exemplified as a searching after obscurities. Such was the negative fate of Gabrielle - or 'the rest of her that was alive' after love had failed - who was left 'To grope alone for lost obscurities' (p.792). The narrator of The Man Who Died Twice observes that, had it not been for Nash's 'unaccompanied expiation'

"The shape of one more foiled obscurity
Might some time as a cadaver have ensured
A massive and unusual exhibition
Of God's too fallible image - and no more." (p.935)

Complexities and congruities are humble servants of the intangible psyche. Bartholow's, as well as Shakespeare's adumbration of man

is summed up as 'this coil of our complexities'. (p.302)

"It's all a matter of our congruities", Gerth tells Matthias;

"They make us as we are". (p.1086) Malory believed that intuition and fate limited to one aim was sufficient;

'Malory would attend

To as much thinking of his own enigma

As was imperative or expedient;

And a man saying that was not at odds

With his obscurity'. (pp.1027-28)

However, things turn out unexpectedly. Finally prepared to devote his life 'To service' 'in acity of pain', he feels

'the lonely joy of being alive

In a good servitude, and of not being

Obscurely and ^{un}intelligently wasted.' (p.1069)

Obscurity is not to be discounted, of course, in the psychology of human relations, nor in characterization. Laramie had been to Cavender 'A warm enigma that he would not read Or strive to read' (p.969); whilst Gerth's unrealised brotherhood with Matthias is expressed in the simple gesture of looking 'Matthias in the eye With penetrating and obscure affection That was not love.' (p.1030) The enigmatic personalities of Penn-Raven, Avon's enemy, and Cavender's projection are studies in the obscure. Penn-Raven is an 'obscure adventurer' to whom pertain 'obscure details' and 'obscure appearances'.

Robinson treated obscurity symbolically as well as inferentially. Darkness is its symbol, the darkness of the

universe representing the mystery of God and the darkness of the human house representing the mystery of man. So great is the poet's habitual sense of the indefinable that it infects his whole conception of the artistic representation of the subtleties of experience and states of mind. It is not surprising, therefore, that obscurity often affects the way (form, style, technique) in which he tells a story. This aspect has been so excellently summed up by Barnard that one can do no better than to quote him at this point. He says:

"the stripped, compressed, metaphorical or allusive intensity of certain passages, the seeming diffuseness of others, where what ought seemingly to be obvious facts are almost lost in a maze of subtle but distantly relevant details; the frequent lack, on the other hand, of what the reader can only regard as essential data; the inferential, tentative, oblique, contingent, often negative, ironic or paradoxical manner of expression; the resort to symbolism and allegory; the dramatic, unannotated presentation of story and character - all these reflect the quality of Robinson's vision, his sense of the unconquerable elusiveness of the ultimate fact, his acceptance of the equivocal nature of all that we apprehend outside ourselves... Concerning a person's inward life, especially, where the motives and emotions are perhaps unconfessed even to himself, our most searching questions must often go unanswered.

But when were thoughts or wonderings
To ferret out the man within?

the poet asks as he muses on the fate of Clavering..."¹⁰
 Nevertheless, astute depth psychology is a great reconciler.
 Contact with the soul's affinities is possible in a virile
 personality; through acceptance of suffering, through self-
 sacrifice, the personality may consciously acknowledge the
 negligibility of its ego; and, by a process of self-discipline
 based on self-understanding, the personality may bring the
 greater part of its life under rational surveillance. Thus the
 "psychological ideal" that Thomas Mann defines as "enlightenment"
 and "the primacy of reason"¹¹ is not an impossible objective.
 "To a few" like Matthias, Fargo, Nash, and Cavender (he finally
 found unexpected 'peace'), Amaranth murmurs 'not in vain' ...

"They knew the best there is for man to know,

They know the peace of reason." (p.1392)

Sir Thomas Browne's compromise, therefore, need not represent
 defeat and discontent if one believes, as did Keats, in the
 'negative capability' of half-knowledge, or if one, like Robinson,
 can incise an adumbration with a scalpel of light and can justify
 obscurity in terms of purposeful necessity. The soul's eye
 (that of Matthias or Bartholow, for instance) may eventually
 perceive the wounding light; even though for many like Gabrielle
 the inward eye is perpetually closed in pre-natal obscurity. Bartholow
 'had seen much in his illumination -

Failing a better name for the unknown -

That she, having a soul that had no eyes,

If she had any, had not been born to see'. (p.737)

Laramie tells Cavender she has

"come forbidden

To light the way before you, which is dark

For you and all alive; and it is well

For most it should be." (p.972)

The mirrors in Amaranth's eyes reflect to the beholder the true self behind the obscurity, but the necessity of obscurity to the life instinct is preponderant in general man. Amaranth warns the poet Pink that "For most, there is more joy, if not more wisdom, in seeing not too well." But the poet does not heed the warning; he looks in Amaranth's eyes, and declares with the laconic logic of dream: "Excuse me, while I go and hang myself." (p.1324).

Robinson is accordingly revealed as a traditionalist in his image of man as a sensitive creature encompassed by obscurities and half-knowledge, and in his affirmation that man's profoundest realisation may lie in the knowledge that obscurity and truth will always remain incomprehensible but salutary absolutes. But this by no means forms the sum total of the Robinsonian adumbration of man. Knowledge has evolved and advanced since Browne's age, and today the human mind has a different way of looking at the human mind; while many past obscurities, after all, have not proved incommensurate with present reason. Literature faithfully records the changes. Robinson lived before, with, and beyond the threshold of the modern age and present century, and his writing often expresses the tension between the traditional way and the

modern manner, yet also often creates ^a fusion of the two which is an achievement rare in modern poetry. He subscribed to the traditional way of steering a middle course, welcoming the reasonable, and shunning the excessive, deployment of the faculties and senses. He perceived little historical evidence of change in the psychology of man, except perhaps in terms of the social group and the ever-widening powers of social strangulation. On the other hand, his manner is modern in its psychological honesty and earnestness. His literary consciousness is a James-or-Eliot-like reactionary modernism directed against the superficialities of observation, the saccharine, sordid or ornate taste; it is true to the realities in which it has its roots; his art strives to expose what lies below superficial perception and sensibility. It is penetrating, unobs^{cur}vantist, and provides an intermittent incision to buried-alive experience. Unknown purposes and that obscurity of darkness - the unconscious - are what it tries to make more meaningful.

"Hearts are dark places. And if they were not,
There might be so much less for us to learn
That we who know so little, and know least
When our complacency is at its best,
Might not learn anything." (pp.967-68)

(111)

As a writer in depth, searching for belief, in an age that regards itself as a scientific civilization, Robinson expressed what H.H.Waggoner said he must: "the tension between fact and value,

science and poetry." ¹² Waggoner regards Robinson as a semi-acclimatized infant of late nineteenth-century scientific thought in his view of the world as alien, and claims that his philosophy, (so-called), ¹³ was inherently a reaction against the unhappy revelations of science. He contends that the weakness of Robinson's thought, in this regard, lay in its emphasis on the need to believe rather than on belief. The 'tension' in Robinson's poetry is composed of two intellectually separable conditions, or contradictions.

The first contradiction is one within nature in which tension results from two incompatible world concepts: the world as materialism reveals it and the world as the expression of an unseen purpose. When Robinson's major characters find themselves in a neurotic dilemma as to the worth of life, they usually refer to this tension as the epitome of the moral and psychological ambiguity that oppresses them. Cavender, in a guilty dilemma as to the validity of life and morality and his personal motives, expresses the contradiction succinctly when he ponders:

'And so there must be God, or if not God,
A purpose or a law. Or was the world,
And the strange parasites infecting it,
Serpent, or man, or limpet, or what not,
Merely a seeming endless incident

Of doom? If it was so, why was it so? (p.982)

The author's attitude can be gauged from the circumstances of doubt and faith in which he places his characters. Insensitive,

egoistic and covetous minds accept the materialist explanation of the world without a qualm; sensitive but psychologically disordered intellects accept such an explanation only after soul-torment, or preparatory to self-destruction; the heroic souls (people who see a light and follow it), however, refute scientific materialism, and only succumb to it doubtfully and temporarily during a time of despair induced by personal loss and pathognomic values.

The human prototype in the first circumstance is that particular man against the sky whom Waggoner describes as

"an ambitious and wordly man who, absorbed in his pride and search for power, finds no reason to question his importance in the scheme of things and takes pride in "being what he must have been by laws Infrangible and for no kind of cause", a man who looks with his "mechanic eyes" at an "accidental universe" but is not disturbed because he cannot conceive
14
of the world without him."

Gerth symbolizes the second circumstance. Timberlake tells Natalie

"There's a malignance in the distribution
Of our effects and faculties. It is nature,
And our faith makes it more. If it's no more,
Gerth waited longer than was logical
For a good atheist who believed himself
And life a riot of cells and chemistry -
If he believed it." (p.1107)

Bartholow is an example of a character placed in the third circumstance. In a state of despair conditioned by the death of Gabrielle, 'he saw the world a spinning cinder, Where neither fire nor pride would burn again.' (p.833) But the fire of personality and the pride of reason did burn again for him; the light was somewhere upon the earth, and the poem concludes with Bartholow setting out after it.

It is not difficult to comprehend, therefore, why a Robinsonian character like Malory should feel the urge 'to dislocate Creation.' Moreover, it is characteristic of the poet's intellectual honesty and intellectual method that he stressed the illogical reality of the alien world.

'Life was a fabrication of the demons
On land, or in the sea, or in the air,
A snake, seeing a man, could frighten him
And sting him to quick death; and a small fly
Could sting him to slow death, and with no aid
Of dream or fancy. A far smaller thing

Than a small fly had shattered Nightingale...' (pp.1035-36)

Late in 1931 Robinson outlined his opposition to the mechanist interpretation of life in a letter to Will Durant which contained the following statement;

"The cock-suredness of the modern "mechanist" means nothing to me; and I doubt if it means any more to him when he pauses really to think. His position is not entirely unlike that of an intrepid explorer standing on a promontory in a fog, looking through the newest thing

in the way of glasses for an ocean that he cannot see,
 and shouting to his mechanistic friends behind him that
 he has found the end of the world."¹⁵

It is not surprising, therefore, that shortly afterwards, the poet employed a similar metaphor to show the futility of a utopia motivated by fanatical escapism and founded on the mechanistic assumptions of a science that fails to serve the light or to provide 'the World's crown Of common glory'. In Amaranth, Ipswich the inventor invites Fargo to repress his fears with the aphrodisiac of his mad idea, and to embark with him for 'a world built for us' where billows roar 'on undiscovered promontories'. (p.1356) Ipswich lost the proportion of life because of his faith in science and his blindness as to his capabilities. His refusal to give up the 'soul-wrenching' search for an impossible ideal resulted in the death of his wife, whom he loved 'more than life, but less than science'. (p.1352) The man-made futility of his ship, 'Driven to move By some last artifice of mind and action', together with its 'superannuated' passengers, drowned in the 'dark flood' which claims most of man's impossible and irrational pretensions.

Man cannot 'dislocate Creation' or change 'the laws That
 have creation in their keeping'.¹⁶ He can utilize, though, the 'power' within him to find a reason for nature and its laws. Penn-Raven expressed a Robinsonian thought when he said:

"You are yourself - no other -

And we that are ourselves are all or nothing;

And if life, as I view it, has a reason,

Death is among the least of little things.

If there's within you, and I hope there is,

A power to rend the skill you cannot see

That in your loneliness has grown around you,

And yet may crush you, make of it all you may'. (p.785)

The second contradiction in "the tension between fact and value, science and poetry" is by far the more important theme (Robinson's poetic interests being primarily psychological), and expresses the tension within man that results from the antipathy between his mechanistic limitations and his higher nature, between his unconscious submission to the Nothingness beyond fact and his unconscious belief in the Something beyond fact. The subconscious voice of the higher nature tells Matthias, in the moment of his spiritual crisis:

"There's more of you for you to find, Matthias,

Than science has found yet, or may find soon.

Science that blinds its eyes incessantly

With a new light that fades and leaves them aching,

Whatever it sees, will be a long time showing

To you, Matthias, what you have [✓]stiven so hard

To see in the dark." (p.1150)

Robinson conveyed the 'tension' empirically and rationally as well as poetically. He explored both psychological sides of the

contradiction. He did not deny the apparent, cold facts of existence, especially those revealed by psychology. Nor did he deny the determinⁱⁿistic basis of the undetermined personality, its regression to previously determined patterns of behaviour, under stress and anxiety. He perceived the ~~mechanical~~ frailty of the human organism. Malory, for example ~~crawled~~

'maimed ant of a wreck

That had been life, There was no life since then;

For man, even if divine, is mechanism

While he is here, and so is not himself

If much of him be broken.' (p.1012)

Certain descriptions of Bartholow's shaken state of mind accord with the unpleasant revelations of depth psychology:

'he could feel himself

Inveigled nearer the abysmal verge

Of indecision, where below him lay

Unplumbed abasement...

so it was that a vindictive remnant

Of hitherto subservient cave-man

Persuaded or enforced him to believe.' (p.809)

Bartholow's attack on Penn-Raven, 'willed' by 'the primeval in him', is a release of the repressed 'cave-man'; the poet instances this as an acknowledgement of 'the unseen survivals that are in us.' (p.810) Matthias learns that the unconscious spirit, who speaksto him through Garth's voice, has witnessed the assimilation of the archaic heritage:

"I have seen men with more hyena in them

Than man; and I've seen others with more worms." (p.1151)

"In the realm of the mind", Freud tells us, "the primitive type is ... commonly preserved along-side the transformations which have developed out of it..."
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Malory similarly experienced primitive man's psychic processes, in particular his instinctual apprehension of personified and psychical nature:

'He felt and heard from silent places
A murmur^u of all things mocking him
And his assurance as he moved along,
Which may have been a remnant left in him
Of an ancestral fear'. (p.1017)

Malory's desire is primitive, a reversion to the savage's justice and to a primal crime...

'... there was nothing left
Of Malory but some primitive wheels and springs,
Wound still to go till he was tired of them,
And of their ticking.' (p.1018)

It is no wonder that his thoughts wander to one, Absalom Spinner, an alcoholic and 'primeval' 'dereliction', who also attempted to murder Nightingale and also failed; and no wonder that he is sensitive of the ancestral sea's 'cold primordial mockery.' (p.1041). He saw the ocean

He saw the ocean

'As men had seen it who were not yet men.
In ages lost in the long void of time,
It must have tossed and foamed as helplessly

As now, at the wind's will; and to the eyes
 Of Malory's unimagined ancestors
 It must have been a fearsome mystery,
 Filled with infernal things in ancient fancy,
 As it was now in fact. ' (p.1035)

^S
 Fantasy and projection activities of the primitive mind,
 retained by the modern mind, ^{are} alluded to as 'infernal
 things in ancient fancy' projected upon inanimate nature.
 Malory experiences a fleeting reversion to a primeval ego-
 feeling, which, however, is insignificant and unalarming
 when compared with, say, Avon's fearful belief that eternal
 nature was preparing to annihilate him. Freud has described
 the above phenomenon in terms of ego-psychology; in Civilization
and Its Discontents, for example, he wrote:

"Originally the ego includes everything, later it
 detaches from itself the external world. The ego-feeling
 we are aware of now is thus only a shrunken vestige of a
 far more extensive feeling - a feeling which embraced the
 universe and expressed an inseparable connection of the
 ego with the external world."
 18

Malory's submergence in the timeless, archetypal realm,
 however, does not obliterate the alienation and division of
 consciousness; the feeling he experiences is not so much "oceanic"
 "oneness with the universe", as Freud described it - although the
 "notion of limitless extension" is paramount - as a recognition
 of fate and Empedoclean strife.

Robinson's characters testify to the principle of tension as it is mirrored in aspects of psychological ambivalence. At the primal, biological and sub-conscious level of experience, Freud's instinctual duality of Eros and Death is prominently acknowledged as the basis of conflict and the cause of neurosis. The Robinsonian character attempts to cure his neurosis ('this cannibal banquet of man's life') by easing the tension of the instinctual ambivalence, and by either synthesizing the opponents into one harmony of reconciliation and acceptance, or displacing death. "There is no quiet in life", according to Malory, "and may be none Till we have known that living is not dying." (p.1024) The power of the death instinct as impulse and wish is well exemplified in the character and fate of both Garth and Natalie. Matthias says of Garth : "For cause that was apparent, Dying was his career." (p.1098) Natalie 'wished herself extinct' (p.1100), and Timberlake tells her that "A normal morbid mortuary impulse" (p.1102) brought him to the place of death. Natalie confesses her bewilderment at the eternal conflict, and declares :

"Our fate and ways are so malignantly

Mixed up that it's a miracle to me

So few of us die crazy." (p.1107)

Freud views death and its conflict with Eros in terms of biological, and hence psychological, necessity, and postulates that the ambivalence is grounded in the nature of life itself. Robinson expresses similar notions in describing Natalie's 'mortuary impulse' :

'The trees and rocks

Down there were calling her. There was a place
 ... a square monstrous rock that she remembered
 As one too large to be. More like a tomb,
 Where man's hand for a time had followed nature's,
 Than a thing there by chance, it would be there
 When Egypt was forgotten, and was calling
 Natalie to come down to the dark place
 Where they found Garth.' (p.1101)

Accordingly, when the conflict seems to aim towards death rather than life, when it appears invincible, it is generally envisaged not as a human aberration but as a biological necessity. This gives rise to a concept of the disease of existence in which time and motion are death and Eros in a dialectical progression of seeming futility. Such is Nightingale's (as opposed to Robinson's) view of the matter when he concludes a lengthy analysis with the following words:

"I told you about time and the earth moving.
 Arthritis and Ataxia - two alphas,
 And a malevolent long alphabet
 Between them and Omega". (p.1051)

Repression in the form of negation is an 'active form of dying' that also contributes to the tyrannical power of the death instinct. Brown, in Life Against Death, writes:

"The way the human organism protects itself from the reality of living-and-dying, is, ironically, by initiating a more active form of dying, and this more active form of dying

is negation. The primal act of the human ego is a negative one - not to accept reality ... this negative posture blossoms into negation of self (repression) and negation of the environment (aggression). But negation ... is a dialectical or ambivalent phenomenon, containing always a distorted affirmation of what is officially denied...

It is thus a general law of the ego not strong enough to die, and therefore not strong enough to live, that its consciousness of both its own inner world and the external world is sealed with the sign of negation; and through negation life and death are diluted to the point that
19
we can bear them."

Robinson describes Bartholow, who had been near "to the shreds of living death" (p.784), and his old malady, in terms of a negation which incorporates the above characteristics. Penn-Raven had come 'strongly out of the unknown' to 'release' Bartholow from 'his ancestral prison'. The poet then says of Bartholow:

' Never before

Would he have said that any friend alive
Had magic to make light so gross a weight
As long had held him frozen out of sense
And hearing of all save a dead negation
That would not let him die. When Gabrielle,
Serving a triple need, so fondly sought
And rarely found, of beauty, mind and fire,
Had failed him - where was life, and what was left? '

(p.p.733-4)

Procreant woman, preserver of the forms - 'beauty, mind and fire' - of Eros, is thus a symbol of Eros itself; and the failure of her love makes way for the rule of the death instinct. When Malory lost his wife he felt the light of Eros go out. Plunged in darkness, he was thenceforth bound by the will of the death instinct to a twofold purpose: the extermination of Nightingale, followed by personal and entire surrender to death. However, when he finds that 'Nature' has accomplished the first part of his plan for him, the consequent stage is left in a vacuum; the rule of death begins to give way to the 'unforseen Release' of the 'replenished' Eros,

'with a new wish

To live - a wish that had in it more wonder
 Than satisfaction. A new fear of living
 Had come to him who had no fear of dying,
 Or wish to die, or means to live. He wondered
 How such a warfare of inept negations
 Might end - when for a moment, having turned
 Himself to look at Nightingale again,
 He fancied he was in the way of knowing
 Immediately of that; for the first sight
 That held him was no invalid in a chair,
 But a black weapon pointing silently
 Straight at him. He considered the short barrel
 And then the square pale face of Nightingale,
 Grinning mysteriously and ominously,

More like a living mask on a dead face
 Than like a face alive. But Nightingale
 Was living, and for the nonce, apparently,
 Was finding life a privilege and a pleasure'. (p.1036)

The gun symbolises the death instinct, and Nightingale emphasizes its potency as an ability almost to rise above matter:

"This thing of mine - it was not always mine -
 Is educated and almost alive,
 And might have speech." (p.1036)

The gun turned towards Malory represents extroverted death, but its real, final and dedicated aim is to fulfil its instinctual desire (which it does in Nightingale's case) to turn it back against self. Symbolically, it also illustrates the attachment of aggressive instincts to death. In Malory, the death instinct unsuccessfully fights for its life; whereas, in Nightingale, the life instinct, manifesting a last gratification of the pleasure principle, unsuccessfully fights for its life.

Another aspect of the "negative orientation of the human
 20
 ego" is what Freud, who defined "the process of repression proper" as consisting in "a detachment of the libido from people - and things - that were previously loved", termed object-loss. The object-loss is the acme of the Robinsonian theme of frustration and characterizes nearly all of his stories. The tragedy of Nightingale and near-tragedy of Malory hinge on their common object-loss, Agatha. Nightingale loved Agatha, but lost her to Malory; Agatha and Malory loved each other, but he lost her to death. The loss enforced a "negative orientation of the ego"

in both men, but Nightingale's was irredeemable while Malory's hung in the balance, but finally became ineffectual. The destructive instinct carried Nightingale through two ultimate stages - extroversion against Malory and Agatha, introversion against himself. His objects (Agatha and, later, the mansion by the sea that had been the other part of his life's dream) are unrecoverable, although sublimation half-retains the latter. Although he dies ultimately frustrated, a remnant of Eros asserts itself in the recoverability of the mansion as an object in service, not to self, but to mankind - life, Eros - present and unborn. Malory's salvation lies in his acceptance of Eros' purposes, especially those relating to the advancement of scientific knowledge in bacteriology, and in his recognition that a negative attachment to the lost love-object is futile. Hence the significance of his remarks concerning Agatha:

"There is no grief in me

For your [Nightingale's] release, and there is no hate now
For Agatha's. If I could bring her back,
By calling her, to live and die again,
I should be silent; for I cannot know
The pain there was that was not hers to suffer,
Because she was not here." (p.1072)

When negation is powerful, the ego is weak and seeks escape in the pleasurable or terrorising gratifications of hallucinatory experience. As Brown interprets it, "The separation in the present is denied by reactivating fantasies of past union

and thus the ego interposes the shadow of the past between itself²² and the full reality of life and death in the present."

Cavender's House is the example par excellence; lesser examples are provided by Malory's communion with Agatha in the cemetery, and Matthias' unconscious assumption of the voice of a lost, now dead, object. Finally, negation resulting from object-loss is associated with instinctual dualism in effecting frustration. The most convincing of Robinson's women, such as Gabrielle and Natalie, possess instinctual qualities fated to frustration. In idealising time, they misinterpret Eros and love. Laramie tells Cavender:

"What a way

We women have, having no foresight in us,

Of seeing time only as the minute given

For us to take, as a bird takes a worm,

Or as man takes a woman... " (p.979)

Frustration proceeds from the physical to the mental plane where it symbolises the strife between mind and body, Eros and death. Laramie says she "should have done more thinking" and "should have taught" herself "more ²variable ways to make" her "surer still That" she "should never be sure".

"But for the few

Who know, and in their hearts cannot but know

Security and content, women had best

Believe, or best believe they do not care - " (p.p.996/7)

Herbert Marcuse could have been discussing Robinson's poetry, instead of Freud's 'struggle against the flux of time' when he wrote:

"This primary frustration in the instinctual structure of man becomes the inexhaustible source of all other frustrations - and of their social effectiveness. Man learns that "it cannot last anyway", that every pleasure is short, that for all finite things the hour of their birth is the hour of their death - that it couldn't be otherwise. He is resigned before society forces him to practice resignation methodically. The flux of time is society's most natural ally in maintaining law and order, conformity, and the institutions that relegate freedom to a perpetual utopia; the flux of time helps men to forget what was and what can be : it makes them oblivious to the better past and the better future."

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True, says Unphraville;

"There is a madness born with all of us,
Possibly. There are signs enough of it.
The poisoning inertia of our custom
Has had its way with many a man before,
And many a woman." (p.835)

Custom is, therefore, "the arch-enemy of nature" and, in this respect, "Nature is here apparently to suffer." (p.838) Where Marcuse would misrepresent Robinson's psychology, however, would be in his omission of ^{the} poet's Eros-saving sublimation: the individual, non-social thrill of the infinite advance towards the immortal town: 'In the final direction of the elementary town I advance for as long as forever is'.

The sociological and archetypal implications of instinctual duality are profound : the former, which are discussed in a later chapter, result in a pessimistic outlook concerning modern civilization and an acknowledgement of the massive determining powers of death and aggression in the historical process; the latter are conceived as mytho-poetic and moral factors.

By an introjection of myth and mythical time into the atavistic unconscious, Robinson quite frequently made metaphors of the universal sickness in nature and of the disposition towards 'psychical entropy' in the sick being. Mythical dualities of the after-life-heaven (Eros in harmony with the Nirvana principle of the death instinct?) and hell (repetition - compulsion and masochism in the death-instinct?) - are symbols related to the Eros-Death ambivalence. The sick and guilty Cavender, whom "the dogs of hell Follow", believes Laramie could have come from heaven. She represents the life principle that finally compels Cavender to accept life and reject his neurosis, which is an infection of the death principle. Instinctual hell's residents, aggression and death, are agents of the devil. Malory referring to the destruction of Agatha, tells Nightingale :

" You destroyed her

With hell's deliberation in your method ...

You may have been the devil ... " (p.1045)

It is not surprising that Jung sees poetic method in many psychic activities, for he tells us that "Heaven has become empty space to us, a fair memory of things that once were. But our heart

glows and secret unrest gnaws at the roots of our being."

Remembering his relationship with Agatha before she met Malory, Nightingale mistakenly believes he had been "as near to paradise As many may be." (p.1053) Malory and Agatha, on the other hand, were joined in mortal paradise before Nightingale, with his 'thwarted vision', worked his evil purposes. 'Where' Malory 'was not forgotten,

He was among the most of all unenvied

Who have survived their dreams. It was a story

Of a worm boring in a noble tree ...' (p.1016)

He wanted 'to dislocate' the 'Creation' that had given him Eden only as a means to achieve his fall. But such sinful desires provoked 'an ancestral fear' of the offended and forgotten god.

Primal sin, which results in the fall into instinctual duality, and primal crime (murder), which results in an accumulation of guilt, are basic introjections that reflect the neurotic dilemma of psychic ambivalence. The psychological consequences of the fall assume dictatorial and evil proportions in the minds of certain of Robinson's characters. "You are still you, And Adam was your father", Ieremie tells Cavender. Cavender is civilization's Adam without his Eve; he lost her in succumbing to primal sin and primal crime - the latter being ^a culmination of the former. Harmony gives way to chaos in unconsciousness and the instinctual life; the primal state of undifferentiated unity is shattered. Cavender sins in relation to knowledge ('Knowledge is cruel') concerning Ieremie, and subsequently inflicts her death. His sin is perpetuated in a desire to know what he

may never know; his crime is perpetuated in his guilt. Eros is not safe, even in Eden; says Laramie wistfully, "how cruel it is That love should entertain so many chances." (p.975) But Cavender's Eden resides in the collective unconscious, 'a fair memory of things that once were'; for he was already in a fallen state when with his Eve. Man had fallen from a harmony of Eros and Death into a condition of perpetual dying in which love is a house of ruins and 'passion and sick pride' its only furniture.

Malory's sin lies in his belief that he was fate, a 'king' of the instinctual duality ('He was a king, Whose word was life or death; and it was death', (p.1018)) whereas, in his temporary blindness, his intentions are merely slaves of the monarch of death. Laramie refers to both the paradise of undifferentiated unity, and the fall into instinctual duality, when she tells Cavender:

"Love would have been

The death of you far likelier than of her,

If there was to be death." (p.1004)

Cavender, as the archetypal Adam who offends the "holy Ghost" (p.998), rationalises his responsibility for evil by projecting it on to the immortal foe of God and man :

"There was a devil ahead of me, unseen

And unsuspected; for there may have been one,

Because there must have been." (p.984)

But Cavender's final act, a re-fusion of Eros and death in reconciliation, is achieved in the 'hope' of grace. His fear is not one of death, but of Eros, and in conquering that fear

Cavender begins to atone for the fall, which he in turn perpetuated in his desire for knowledge of good and evil.

Laramie tells him:

"Your living and my dying ...

Are nothing to your knowing whether or not

My freedom was a sin." (p.990)

However, the ache of consciousness that provoked his wrath and established the surrender of spirit to animality proves to be the eventual healing balm and enables him to attain 'mastery over himself'.

"It is not without justification that the biblical story of creation put the undivided harmony of plant, animal, man, and God into the symbol of Paradise at the beginning of all psychic being, and described the first act of becoming conscious - "ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" - as the fatal sin. For it must appear as a sin to the naive mind to break the law of the sacred primordial oneness of all - consciousness. It is luciferian defiance of the individual against the oneness, It is a hostile act of disharmony against nature, it is separation against all - embracing unity. And yet the gaining of consciousness was the most precious fruit on the tree of life, and the magic weapon which gave man mastery over the earth, and which we hope will enable him to win the even greater victory of mastery over himself."

The differentiated consciousness resulting from the primal sin, therefore, is responsible for the perplexing 'moral ambiguity' which is to be found in Robinson's stories. Winters, commenting on "the theme of the ambivalent benefactor" in Roman Bartholomew and The Glory of the Nightingales, pertinently remarks :

"This moral ambiguity is familiar in New England literature... In Melville and James... and ... Hawthorne ... the ambiguity is the result of a deep uncertainty, essentially metaphysical in its nature,²⁶ which causes the writer a genuine anguish ..."

Winters maintains that "in Robinson the quality of the feeling has deteriorated into "exaggerated ingenuity" ; yet the evidence of the essential tension in Robinson's work, and of the psychological perception of ambiguity, seems to contradict Winters' assessment. Robinson is a supreme psychologist of the ambiguous fall who - as a friend said - "saw the possibilities of good in thwarted²⁷ lives that seemed wholly evil." Like Jung he believed that good and evil "belong to the chiaroscuro of life", and that "there is no good that cannot produce evil and no evil that²⁸ cannot produce good;" like Freud he saw the apparent "paradox ...²⁹ that human nature has a far greater capacity both for good and for evil, than it thinks it has..."

The primal crime, the man-made evil (in Freudian psychology, patricide), and the subsequent unconscious guilt, have been phylogenetically handed down to modern man. Thus Cavender's "ancestors ... may, unwittingly, have had to do With" his "catastrophe". (p.994)

"For Freud the primal crime was a historical fact . . .
 whose consequences are reproduced ... in every
 generation, it is also a biological fact ... It
 then follows that the problem of guilt is insoluble.
 Freud, who abandoned many illusions, did not abandon
 the illusion that Adam really fell ... " ³⁰

Cavender, Malory, and Nightingale are obsessed by the primal crime, Cavender in terms of primal passion, Malory in terms of primal justice, Nightingale in terms of primal evil. Cavender and Nightingale have actually implemented the crime and hence suffer one hundred-fold the 'insoluble' 'guilt'. They are 'the foiled and fallen' to which Matthias alludes; foiled, because of the frustration exacted by instinctual ambivalence; fallen, because instinctual chaos and differentiated consciousness are their new heritage. In them the death instinct has motivated the aggressive extroversion of death. Cavender is a symbol of psychological justice. Nightingale is a symbol of biological justice, Malory is a symbol of deflected purpose as a result of natural intervention. All three evidence the fate of nature, on one hand, and its compensatory arbitration of duality, on the other. Guilty conscience fights back against crime, consciousness against repression, Eros against death. And so

"Eternity may have time and room to show us

How so transformed a fabric may be woven

Of crimes, corruptions, and futilities ... " (p.994)

Remorse and guilt are implanted in the breast of man as surely as destruction: Cavender is "not one To desecrate" his "code without remorse" (p.993); Nightingale contemplated 'a sea and sky ... pictured With shipwreck and remorse'. (p.1034) "Convenient fluid conscience" didn't survive in Nightingale's "thwarted soul"; instead a native conscience, "Humility and surrender"; raised him to whatever dignity he finally attained.

Both men illustrate the nature of the super-ego as described by Brown, who quotes Freud, in the following sentences., "What we call 'conscience' perpetuates inside of us our bondage to past objects now part of ourselves: the super-ego 'unites in itself the influences of the present and of the past. In the emergence of the super-ego we have before us, as it were, an example of the way in which the present is changed into the past' " ³¹ Agatha and Laramie became the better parts of Nightingale and Cavender.

Jung might well have been addressing these men when he wrote:

"The sting of bad conscience even spurs you on to discover things which were unconscious before and in this way you might cross the threshold of the unconscious mind and become aware of these impersonal forces that make you the unconscious instrument of the wholesale murderer in man." ³² Robinson's view was that man had paid enough for his ancestral sins ('The world has paid enough for Camelot'), but that he must go on paying for his individual, personal sins and crimes. Under his dark burden he murmurs a miserable and dark protest, for he is "still paying, and for some time yet ... may still pay." (p.993)

Robinson acknowledged fate as a protagonist of eternal tension. He saw it demonstrated in the laws of nature, heredity, environment, and biology. Malory, "who became deeply impressed with the fact that the new thing prepared by fate seldom or never corresponds to conscious expectation"; ³³ uncertain whether 'Nature of God' had intervened; learned "how more proficient an assassin Fate was than any Doctor." (p.1044) Fate, as we have seen, also works through repression and instinctual dualism; the primacy of the unconscious impulse; the pre-established forms and timeless habits of primeval patterns. "In the final count, every individual life is at the same time also the life of the eons of the species," ³⁴ Jung said; and Evans reports that Robinson believed "choice is circumscribed, and man is, more surely than he likes to admit, the storehouse of his own destiny. 'I think man's pattern is there before him,' Mr. Robinson said." ³⁵ Accordingly, man's duty is to investigate himself. This "is (or rather should be!) the essential precondition for the taking on of higher duties, even if it is only a question of realizing the meaning of individual life in the best possible form and to the greatest possible extent: Nature always does this, although without responsibility, for this latter is the fated and divine lot of man." ³⁶

Thus against ^{ct} fate, science, and fate Robinson opposed the autonomous psyche, the moral and responsible being, and the higher nature in man.

According to the necessities of narrative, these latter

qualities are revealed but gradually; and it is generally only towards the end of the narrative that the higher nature asserts itself, while claiming for itself, nevertheless, an enigmatic futurity because it represents potentiality as much as consummation. Bartholow, Cavender, Malory and Matthias are victories of the higher nature; yet, at the conclusion of each of their stories, the dominant impression is that of 'hell-survived' rather than 'paradise-attained', and of an expectation, not a fulfilment, and of the 'negative capability' of knowledge. Bartholow 'walked away' from 'A river that should flow for him no more' (p.856); Cavender felt as though 'a door behind him in the dark ... had opened silently, Or as if Laramie had answered him'. (p.1007)

For Malory:

'There was nothing left ... but remembrance
Of the best that was behind him, and life struggling
In the darkness of a longer way before him ...
A darkness where his eyes were to be guided
By light that would be his, and Nightingale's.' (p.1073)

And for Matthias:

'There were long hours to wait
And dark hours; and he met their length and darkness
With a vast gratitude that humbled him
And warmed him while he waited for the dawn'. (p.1155)

In each instance, "Eros, penetrating into consciousness, is moved by remembrance, "and "Time loses its power when remembrance redeems

the past".³⁷ But the "liberation of the past does not end in its reconciliation with the present. Against the self-imposed restraint of the discoverer, the orientation on the past tends towards an orientation on the future. The recherche du temps perdu³⁸ becomes the vehicle of future liberation."

Positive aspects of character and mind challenge the mechanistic nature. Cavender has his conscience, Gabrielle and Natalie have their finer feelings, Nash finds his soul. The psyche asserts itself against its baser nature. Qualities of intellect, compassion, understanding, forgiveness, humility, courage, sensitivity, honour, friendship etc. come into play. Even failures may see the truth about themselves before they die, while those who reconstruct their fissured lives have their personal visions - the inner truths of their own natures - which are the persuasions by which they live.³⁹ The great ally of the higher nature is psychological insight, as seen for example in *Nightingale's* self-recriminations:

"I wandered in the dark for many days
 And many nights before I found my way;
 And there was not a soul in Sharon knew
 What I was finding; and I did not know,
 At first, what I had found. I was to know,
 Thoroughly, only when as a physician ...
 I made a proper search and diagnosis
 Of what the devil within me had been doing;
 When devils have driven their stings in deep enough,
 And done their work, Knowledge has time to mourn." (p.1057)

Self-analysis is not without irony and pathos, for it is generally prompted by adversity and disease. The compensations is often in the coinage of suffering. "If you have healed yourself Too late", Malory tells Nightingale, "you have done something for your soul That even your stricken body will acknowledge, If only with more pain." (p.1055) Nightingale is an unhappy example of the contradiction between the "suffering abstraction Misnamed humanity" (p.1044) and the 'cold weight of mystery that was man' (p.1073) in a pathological context.

"even when you were blind, you may have seen,
Darkly, where you were going, and where you are,
For where you are tonight, there was your place;
And your dark glass is broken." (p.1072)

Nightingale is Robinson's answer to Jung's question: "How can anyone see straight when he does not even see himself and that darkness which he himself carries unconsciously into all his dealings?"⁴⁰

"Self-criticism", writes Jung, "as an introspective discriminating activity, is indispensable to any attempt to understand one's own psychology."⁴¹ Such is the Robinsonian trait par excellence. Matthias had 'to search the darkness in him' (p.1141); Bartholow found it was his 'turn To search in vain to find a buried answer Where search itself was blind' (p.306); Fernando Nash looked into the 'glass' of himself in the manner of those who saw themselves in the 'mirrors' of Amaranth's eyes.

The power to be physician to one's self involves employment of the higher faculties which, after scientific aids have been exploited, are manifested in man's creative, rational and poetic

aspirations of his deepest feelings. The reason acknowledges
the limitations of science in - semantics:

"Language ...

a confused confined phenomenon

Prisoned within a skull, with knowledge in it.

There's not much knowledge in it and less wisdom." (p.1151)

in psychology:

'How far he must go back,

And by what unimaginable guidance,

To find himself in all his origins

Was more than science knew - which was as well,

Also, as other knowledge not for man.' (p.1021)

in philosophy:

'news of an ingenious mechanism

That must have built itself mysteriously

And infinitely out of mysterious nothing', (p.1142)

This philosophic 'news' had no effect on Matthias; all he found
was doubt, Insoluble and impregnable as ever ...' "Wherever science
shows a tendency towards dogma and consequently to intolerance and
fanaticism, ... a justifiable doubt is being hidden and an all-too-well-
founded uncertainty is being explained away." ⁴² The poet in
Robinson, thinking

'Of nature's way and of how small we are

In our performances, and how infinite

In our futilities and our ignorances.' (p.1135)

acknowledged the limitation of finite reason; and the psychologist

in the poet acknowledged the 'buried wound somewhere within him, Deeper than surgeons go.' (p.943). "The breaking up of the harmonious co-operation of the psychic forces that exists in instinctual life is like an ever-open, a never-healing wound, a veritable Amfortas's wound ..."⁴³ Robinson was just as critical of intellectual pride, and of a frantic mysticism, too obviously an illusionary sublimation, which was a shamanistic device for ecstatic levitations and transmigrations and celestial navigations, as he was of mechanistic philosophies.

Robinson's concept of 'nature' is most relevant to his psychology and to his ultimate rejection of scientific materialism, for he perceived that "Science came to a stop at the frontiers of logic, but nature does not - she thrives on ground as yet untrodden by theory."⁴⁴ Moreover it provides the connatural link between the two conditions, or contradictions, of the essential tension. His nature is not the one concept-confined by science; it is nature immaterial and psychical as well as material; it is nature as revealed by psychoanalysis, incorporated into a framework of idealistic belief. It makes a primary demand upon the mind because of the great gulf between its purpose and the material phase of its existence. The scientism of the materialist and mechanist philosophies is accordingly limited, and rejects all things which its methodology is unable to cope with. The humility of ignorance is thus a key factor in the Robinsonian adumbration; obscurity and inscrutability provide one of its pillars, and soul and intellect are two others.

Robinson expresses the essential tension in nature in terms of obscurity. Nature's plan and purpose is obscured by the facts of existence. This obscurity requires a necessary psychology of self-investigation commensurate with the gap between experience and the idea of all-purposeful experience. Laramie expresses the difficulty to Cavender:

"nature, having a plan for us
Too large for your belief or your evasion,
Has made us as we are, women and men;
But why with such a sad misapprehension
Of our acquaintance with ourselves, I ask
As you are asking, and I cannot tell you -
Except as I am told that we must learn
Of our defects and doubts, however they hurt." (p.979)

Many of Robinson's characters see in man the result of activity in a workshop of nature somewhat similar, in the degree to which the product is imperfect, to that envisaged by Freud. The natural man is the imperfect species, 'God's too fallible image'. Timberlake tells Matthias

'many of us
Are more like sketches of ourselves, half done
By nature, and forgotten in her workshop,
Than like a fair or tolerable fulfilment
of her implied intention'. (p.1135)

The difference between this notion and Shakespeare's concept of the "vicious mole of nature" is probably an index of the advance

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of psychological knowledge. Nightingale was 'such a fusion
of mortalities To make one death';

'Where was the use of power,
If a wrong element in the beginning
→ Was to make this of it? Where was the use
Of satisfaction, hatred, or revenge,
If life avenged itself? ' (p.1051)

Umphraville, pronouncing upon the fate of Penn-Raven, declares:

"Nature, that has a deal to answer for,
Put something in him, inadvertently,
Prepared and graduated for the lymph
And essence of a worthier organism'. (p.854)

But the 'workshop' of 'the frenzied endless elements' is
'mysterious' (p.963); and nature does not make us of 'stuff ...
so pliable' that it creates 'a mould that fits us', otherwise
'we should all be each other'. (p.1136) Moreover, Robinson
demonstrates that part of nature's plan, however intangible,
enters plastically into the flux of time and space, and inspires
knowledge, which has been defined as "a force of nature which
goes its way with an inner and irresistible necessity." ⁴⁶ Malory,
whose 'way ... was appointed' in the direction of scientific
knowledge, was 'A man by nature dedicated ... To nature's hard
submission'. (p.1015) Amaranth, on the other hand, embodies
the most important knowledge - knowledge of self. "As one may
not measure what he does, More than fate may" (p.1391), Amaranth
is undoubtedly 'a force of nature'. Moreover, the purpose that
permeates nature also inspires Amaranth, who says to Fargo: "a

mightier voice than you have heard Is over mine the master." (p.1392)

The resigned and reconciled figures of Amaranth, who see the world as alien, at least think of Amaranth as their friend. On the other hand, any attempt to shirk psychological and moral responsibilities on the grounds of a mechanistic nature ('Nature, that made the tree, had made the worm, And Nightingale was not responsible', (p.1016)) is pronounced by the poet to be catastrophic. But with self-realization, allied with light, man may progress beyond resignation and confront nature in an active way.

Although the human psyche is confined by natural forces, the natural man possesses a higher faculty which works mainly unconsciously, and which has been called the 'soul'. Jung recognizes soul in his psychology and describes it as "living being". Like Robinson, he rejects the materialists' denial of the true soul: "In spite of the materialistic tendency to conceive of the soul mainly as a mere result of physical and chemical processes, there is not a single proof of this hypothesis ... There is no reason whatever to picture the soul as a something secondary or as an epiphenomenon ... " ⁴⁷ Robinson stated in 1931: "It is easy, and just now rather fashionable, to say that there is no ⁴⁸ soul, but we do not know whether there is a soul or not." He had a "native inability to believe" in the "futility" that there was not a soul in some purposeful sense. Many of his characters attest to the validity of soul's experience; Bartholomew and Nash said that they had found their souls. (p.p.738, 953). Moreover, Robinson (like Jung) often interprets neurosis in terms of the soul's sickness. "Neurosis is the suffering of a

human soul in its whole, world-wide complexity..."⁴⁹

Bartholow's sickness, for instance, was one of the soul. He was in a "prison" "Without a purpose", he was "a sick soul, alone". (p.762). In recognition of the Freudian axiom that neurosis results from a person's inability to detach himself from the past, the poet writes in Amaranth:

"There are some hungry souls that are so sick

With having nothing but the past to live on ... " (p.1365)

In relation to science, Robinson's argument is as simple as the statement by Jung when he wrote; "Technics and science have indeed conquered the world, but whether the soul has gained thereby is another matter."⁵⁰ In speaking of Bartholow's sickness, Penn-Raven refers to Gabrielle's mechanist demon 'of insistence' when he asks her, "If science tells you it was not the soul That ailed him when I came, why not believe it?" (p.780)

Another aspect of the higher nature by which man, in Robinson's view, learns to live with his natural imperfectibilities is 'faith'. He dismissed all insincere forms of faith bred from convenience and complacency, and espoused the notion that bitterness, remorse, frustration, and suffering were implicit factors in faith. Like Freud, he was a master destroyer of illusions; and there was no illusion which he shattered more violently than the illusion of easy faith in a God of convenience or a materialism of justification. He perceived the weaknesses of a faith grounded solely on psychic weaknesses. Laramie says that for most people "faith, when they are driven to think of it, is mostly doubts and fears." (p.972)

Matthias proves that such a faith is disastrous. But Laramie argues that not all faith is valueless, "There is a faith that is a part of fate For some of us." Hence, nature must embrace faith just as it does knowledge. This faith, in Robinson's poetry, amounts to a belief in purpose and light, and it becomes a persuasive factor once self-psychoanalysis eliminates psychic weaknesses from the need to believe.

Jung wrote:

"It is not every man's lot to be blessed with a faith which anticipates all solutions, and it is not given to all men to rest content and without further desire in the sunshine of revealed truth. That light, which is lit in the heart per gratiam spiritus sancti, just that lumen naturae, however small it may be, is more important to these, the seekers, or at least as important as the big light which "shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not." They found that in the very darkness of nature a light was hidden a scintilla, without which the darkness itself would
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not be black."

Robinson, employing a metaphor of the psychic landscape wrote, less optimistically:

"There is apparently not much anyone can do ... except to follow his own light - which may or may not be the
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light of an ignis fatuus in a swamp."

The Glory of the Nightingale and Matthias at the Door explore the theme of the psychological necessity of a faith

oriented to the lumen naturae. For Malory and Matthias, new faith and a new light emerge from the ruins of the past and crushed belief. The case of Malory provides sufficient illustration of the theme.

The story of the wrecked Malory is one of revenge thwarted by fate, as we have seen, culminating in a renewed dedication to Eros and a reconciliation to time; whilst the story of the doomed, disease-ridden Nightingale is the ambiguous one of good ensuing from evil causes, and the psychological necessity of humility and surrender for at least some peace of mind and resolution of spirit. Robinson summed up the plot, early in the poem, when he wrote, 'The time of' Malory's 'desire, And of' 'Nightingale's' 'iniquity.

Had yet one day's diminished length to fill

Before it was complete, and that was all.

Or was it all? (p.1023)

The first essential impression of Malory is that of a man who had crawled 'maimed out of a wreck That had been life', and who had but one purpose left: to kill another man and then kill himself. Hence, apart from an untenable and exclusive belief in the justice of his purpose as an emissary of fate, he is a man without faith. Robinson also makes a psychologically astute analysis of belief, an analysis in which he ironically exposes the insufficiency of Malory's belief, when he writes:

'Nightingale

Had shattered Malory, and ...

There was a story waiting to be told

By Malory, who believed he knew the peak
 And issue of it - like so many of us
 Whose knowing is belief, and whose belief
 Is a determination to believe
 Whether in God, or in deflated friends,
 Or in ourselves. If we believe enough
 In something - none shall tell another what -
 That's ours to do, we are glad to be alive,
 As Malory was, to do it.' (p.p.1011-12).

Robinson reiterates the truth, revealed in numerous case-histories and researches, that the human being must believe in something, and that progress towards integration of personality depends upon his belief in himself, in his motives and in his potential personality. The pathos of Malory's predicament is that he originally possessed that which his story now shows him to be without.

"For one who has once had it ...

Losing his faith in God is a disaster
 By doubt still clouded and by nature made
 Supportable. But to lose faith in man
 And in himself, and all that's left to die for,
 Is to feel a knife in his back before he knows
 What's there ... " (p.1022)

Malory, however, is left at the end of the narrative, with the definite feeling that his faith will be regained, and with added strength, as a result of his successful assimilation of adversity. Once he realised his purpose was in vain, and once the 'tired

bacteriologist' in him - he who wondered if it was not better 'to be a dog' - had rested, his faculties began a process of re-integration and he feels 'intimations of a coming light'. (p.1062)

Nightingale, too, began to experience a gradual ascent from a darkness without light (the 'fire' of irrationality 'that has no light') before he dies : a feeling that darkness and death in the light of self-realisation, were better than darkness, death, and one more malevolence. Robinson synthesises in Nightingale some of the apparently necessary ways of nature; and in Malory he endeavours to achieve the rare harmony of "the tension between fact and value, science and poetry." These aspects are suggested in the simple majesty of Malory's last address to the dead Nightingale:

"It's all an owing,

For me, and shall be one till I have paid
To man my sum of knowledge, which is little,
God knows, though not so little as I should be
For hiding it, or for throwing it away...

I cannot know

For certain, that your way, dark as it was,
Was not the necessary way of life.
There was in yours at least a buried light
For time and man; and science, living in time,
May find at least a gleam nearer than yours,
For those who are not born to follow it
Before it has been found. There is, meanwhile,
A native light for others, but none born
Of penitence, or of man's fear to die." (p.1072)

Robinson's most favourable attitude to science, as revealed in the portrait of Malory, might be expressed thus: "I do not regard the work of science as a competition to be right at all costs but as a labour for the increase and deepening of knowledge." Nightingale 'bound' Malory to 'service' for the increase of such knowledge.

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As Malory's last words alone infer, the narrative also concludes with the reconciliation in memory of another aspect of tension : that of the Eros-death ambivalence. Malory found 'a way back to himself' and

'His enemies, long pursued and long forsaken
Would be his friends; for death living in them,
Would be his life.'

(p.1062)

Robinson's evaluation of tension is his psychology, a poetically well-defined system of self-analysis and belief which surpasses "the materialistic prejudice" and the "physical hypothesis." He was always searching for the something more inclusive than the purely physical. His status as a psychological poet is not impaired by any didacticism or dogmatism, because his philosophy of mind was dedicated to the definition of the higher nature in man and aimed at its free-functioning release. He would have agreed whole-heartedly with Jung when the latter wrote:

"...a physical hypothesis is taken to be very "scientific" although it is no less fantastic. Nevertheless it fits into the materialistic prejudice, and therefore every kind of nonsense which promises to change psychological phenomena

into physical has the sanction of science.

It is to be hoped that the time is no longer far distant when the relic of rusty materialism which has become devoid of thought can finally be dropped by our
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scientists."

Robinson's psychology is anti-materialistic in its evaluation of materialistic data, and it is a comprehension of human experience and the unconscious in relation to the fallibility of man; the fallacy of teleology, 'the immeasurable distances That are between the nearest and most known Of loving and unfathomable strangers' (p.1013); and the obscurity of "the many forces that are moulding us ". (p.1354) Robinson's psychology, like Jung's, is based ultimately on the assumption of the soul and the necessity of belief; and its purpose lies in the following recognition;

"Nature has the primary claim on mankind, and only long after that comes the luxury of reason. The medieval ideal of a life lived for death should gradually be replaced by a more natural attitude to life, in which the natural claims of man are fully acknowledged, so that the desires of the animal sphere need no longer drag down the higher values of the spiritual sphere in
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order to be able to function at all."

"If psychology remains only a science, we do not reach life."

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(iv)

From a consideration of the tension between fact and value, attention is now turned to the synthesis of the traditional way and

the modern manner. This synthesis is to be found in The Man Who Died Twice, which deals with a traditional theme: the dissipation of great talent; but employs the contemporary manner: the clinical analysis of personality.

The narrative is straightforward. The narrator discovers Fernando Nash, former musician and composer, 'foiled and fallen', reduced to the role of drummer in a Salvation Army band. Nash confesses the story of his decline to the narrator. The achievement of the poem lies in the authenticity of this confession, which, for psychic vividness and depth, could hardly be bettered by revelations exacted under stimulating hypnotic and therapeutic conditions; and culminates in the poetic approximation of powerful artistic feelings. The poem, constructed on a pattern of symbolic visualizations, deals (as Cestre says) "with mental facts and spiritual values". Lacking will, consistent inspiration, patience, and instinctual discipline, Nash sacrificed his potential genius on the black altar of debauchery. He was, Cestre points out, "unable to keep down the lower self "until the "vision" became clear and could be translated "into a musical design." ⁵⁷ "The subconscious in him was attuned to the higher mysteries; but when it shot its evanescent gleam into clear consciousness, it was choked there in a tumult of inchoate thoughts or gross sensations!" ⁵⁸ The bulk of the poetry is taken up with often brilliantly articulated, stream-of-consciousness versions of Nash's hallucinations: the symphony of perdition conducted by Bach's image and played by an orchestra of rats; and the later celestial symphony which represents the creative heights Nash might have reached.

The drums of death that distract his dissipated brain emphasize Nash's artistic death; while the drums of life are the counterfoil sublimation, and emphasize the freedom of the ego from self-pitying evasions and illusions, as well as its reconciliation to fate and God. The symbolic drums reverberate the eternal conflict between death and Eros.

The dramatic accent is singular and modern. There is no ^xeternal conflict, except in terms of a projection of archetypal, psychological forces, but a purely internal one which gives rise to pathological manifestations of an hallucinatory nature that provide the most dramatic moments in the poem.

Cestre, in a rhapsodic assessment of the poem, praises the poem's universality and modernity. He says that it blends "American local coloring" with "a tragedy of universal import". He says that it is modern "in its symbolism and imagery", but "recalls the Greek drama by its human quality and force of catharsis. It unites antique elevation of purpose with the essential novelty of a psychological plot based upon the late discoveries of the science of the subconscious." 59

The French critic attempts to bridge the gap between obscurity and comprehension in his justification of the unusualness of Robinson's 'cases'. He cites traditional drama as a good example of literature which "dealt with exceptional passions" like "incest" and "love-fury" (themes of which Robinson Jeffers is the great exponent in modern narrative poetry), "which yet are kindred to the feelings of the average men and women". Modern psychology,

Cestres maintains, provides the artist with a new general awareness and a new approach to the obscurity of man's inner life:

"Pathological psychology is ... a legitimate subject of modern poetry, not only by introducing pathetic incidents, which in our latter-day civilization hardly bear the character of rarity, but also by bringing poetry within the pale of science, in an age when intellectual curiosity is rampant, and in a field where science deals with mysterious facts particularly suited to the imaginative needs of poetry. The poet, with his sympathetic insights into the secrets of the human soul, becomes the fellow-worker of the psychologist, applying his method of observation, experiment and influence. The difference is that the imaginative writer makes use of the resources of his art to produce
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emotion and wonder."

Many of Robinson's unusual cases concern people in whom, to employ Freudian terminology, "the boundary lines between ego and outer world become uncertain." Robinson believed that this uncertainty provoked self-blindness, often pathological, and ineptitude in the sphere of spiritual values; and his people embody the poet's evaluated and fundamental 'Discontents' of 'Civilization.'

Freud writes in Civilization and Its Discontents:

"From pathology we have come to know a large number of states in which the boundary lines between ego and outer world become uncertain, or in which they are

actually incorrectly perceived - cases in which parts of a man's own body, even component parts of his own mind, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, appear to him alien and not belonging to himself; other cases in which a man ascribes to the external world things that clearly originate in himself, and that ought to be acknowledged by him. So the ego's cognizance of itself is subject to disturbance, and the boundaries between it and the outer world are not immovable." (p. 11)

This dilemma becomes, in Robinson's writing, a symbol of the psychological and spiritual confusion of modern man, and his characters symbolise the dilemma in relation to the external categories: Self, Love, Good, Evil, Power, Fate, Nature, God.

Avon, in Avon's Harvest, is Robinson's most extreme example of the pathology of dilemma. Pathological states of mind, similar but generally less extreme are also described fully in the present six poems.

Pathological psychology, as we have seen, underlies The Man Who Died Twice; it also provides, in combination with subtle, and sometimes tedious, introspection, much of the substance of the five other poems. Gabrielle, Nightingale, Natalie, Gerth and Pink commit suicide. Timberlake and many of the characters in Amaranth are portrayed as 'crushed' lives; Cavender is a murderer, Nightingale an indirect murderer, and Malory a potential murderer; Bartholow suffered from a soul-disease; and Matthias was for long a puppet of civilized megalomania and neurotic fixations.

The pathogenic relationship between the ego and the outer world is manifested, of course, in a confusion of realities. Cavender exemplifies this in totality, while Batholow experiences it as negation:

"Nothing was real

That he could see, and nothing had been real

That he remembered.' (p.806)

It can result in ' a mischosen warfare against self And nature' (p.1349) or in schizophrenia, in which the "resident devil" asserts itself; "There was a devil waiting To steal me from myself", confesses Malory. (p.1046) Clearly, Malory analyses Nightingale as an extreme case of pathological psychology, while the poet heightens the effect with the juxtaposition of physical and psychological, which is an aspect of the symbolic structure whereby Nightingale's biological disease illuminates his psyche's disease. Malory tells Nightingale:

" I know traits

Of more malignities in mortal growth

Than you have heard of, and I know their names;

But not one of an ulcered understanding

That you possessed once, or that possessed you,

Or even the first of human rudiments.

You are the one physician, Nightingale,

For seizures, and peculiar paroxysms

That are not yet established or observed

In books or clinics." (p.p.1054-55)

Robinson describes Matthias' malady, deep-rooted in the unconscious, quite directly:

'It was an incubus -
A thing to be acknowledged and endured,
Like an incurable new malady
Without a name, an ill to be concealed
And never mentioned.' (p.p. 1113-14)

These pathological states are like forces of nature, symbols of the unconscious enormity of mortal blindness and disintegrated emotions. (They are sometimes distorted, eccentrically, to mean an attack on sexuality). Thus, the poet was often careful to point at that the mere naming of a disease with psychological terminology was no assurance of understanding it, and that cure was generally a circumscribed and tortuous process.

Robinson microscopically examines the characters' conscious and unconscious motivations, thoughts, and feelings, and discerns the vast difference between exterior appearance and suppressed impulse, between public behaviour and private behaviour. With realization comes the sloughing of 'a tattered mask', as in Cavender's case, and of a mask of frailty', as in Nash's case. Penn-Raven tells Bartholow: "Your mask and its remote advantages Are unbecoming and uncomfortable" (p. 810); and Malory reflects that, for him, 'Passion for what he sought had worn the face Of patience' and 'the mask had crumbled.' (p. 1018)

This discernment is hardly to be denied characters as

self-conscious as those in Robinson's narrative⁵, although many of them fail altogether to see, or see too late, far enough below the paradox. Malory, on his way to murder Nightingale, observes that few would have realised that his outward calm and harmlessness concealed a homicidal resolve, 'And fewer, seeing it, would have guessed how little it was they saw.' (p.1015) Malory sees many advantages in the psychological cloak ("an unsubstantial armor", Amaranth describes it), in terms of the beneficence of repression, the prevention of primitive urges let off the leash to do violence, if not to one's enemy, then to one's peace of mind. He reflects,

'We should not all sleep well
If night revealed to us our ignorance
Of others whose intents and evidences,
Errors and excellences, we have assayed
And tabulated. How many a one we meet
Would somewhat rather see us in a coffin,
Is not a thought for any for pursuit
On our part ... ' (p.1015)

Night is the unconscious in which death and aggression are realities of survival from more primitive times.

The armor is also worn by those whose marriage has crumbled, but for whom pride and evasion demand a semblance of felicity. Matthias and Natalie agree to patch up the "holes" in the "ship" of their marriage and to keep it afloat with a "flag flying". Matthias sustained

"His eminence as he might, and to the town
 Presented as untroubled and unaltered
 An aspect of achievement and address
 As ever, and with only himself to know
 The sorry toil it was, and Natalie
 Partly to know."

(p.1118)

Their past reflects Jung's observation that "Unfortunately, it is almost a collective ideal to be as negligent and unconscious of love matters as possible. Behind the mask of respectability and decency the power of neglected love poisons ... life."⁶¹

Natalie, Gabrielle, and Laramie had already arrived, before the narratives commence, at the stage which Jung alludes to thus: "Unlived life is a destructive and irresistible force working quietly but relentlessly. The result is that the married woman begins to doubt marriage."⁶²

Matthias accuses Natalie of not playing her part very well (p.p.1121-2), and it is only "bad acting" that enables Bartholow and Gabrielle to suffer their relationship a while. She says:

"I know the world has yet for us an envy,
 Observing us in our felicity,

And I know the world's envy cannot last." (p.757)

"This play of illusion is ... made to serve for the real content of life."⁶³ It seems to be a thematic disposition in Robinson that makes him return time and again to the belief that "The love problem is part of mankind's heavy toll of suffering..."⁶⁴

often attributing the disaster, romantically, to "the tension between fact and value, science and poetry": for modern love is not exempt from the contingencies of the mechanistic delirium or the political emporium:

"Have you not heard yet, anywhere, death bells ringing
For Love and poor Romance? Biologists
And bolshevists are ringing them like mad -
So loud that Love, we're told, will soon be lost
With dodos, dinosaurs, and pterodactyls." (p.p.992-3)

Significantly, the remarks are passed by the repressed and wronged female image (Laramie) to the dark, emotionally dishevelled, and sexless Eros of the male (Cavender).

It is, of course, indisputable that the ironical innacuracy of the world's, or an outsider's, judgement of private lives, a judgement based on personal, sociological, euphemistic, or deterministic prejudices, is a conspicuous theme in Robinson's poetry. In Cavender's House the poet employs the theme, near the end of the poem, not only to dismantle the armor with which Cavender had obscured his private guilt, but also as a technique to clarify certain details of plot that had previously been unmentioned or merely intimated. The voice of Laramie says:

"None of your friends,
Or mine, could tell you where I was that night,
For none could say till early workmen found me.
The town's had never so rich a mystery
Before or since to engage its hungry tongue,
It was cream for cats; and all the time

They wondered why the woman they most envied
 Should do it. It was peculiar, Cavender;
 And you could answer nothing. You were broken,
 And it was no more than in tune with nature
 That you should bury me and then go away.
 But why could you not so much as hesitate
 That night, before you seized me and then threw me
 Down on those rocks, a hundred feet below us? " (p.p.999-1000)

Thus Robinson allows Cavender to emerge from the underworld at this stage, signifying the first significant release from the past and inner chaos, to intensify the internal gravity in the mirror of objective reality.

There is nothing especially unusual about the ego-defence of the psychological 'armor' or cloak, and most of the examples above indicate that Robinson was often an observer of natural psychological habits. Penn-Raven declares "We are all players to our necessities" (p.777); Natalie observes 'the defects Of her necessities.' (p.1117) Natural reactions provide a realistic accompaniment to the conflict between soul and extraordinary devils which occurs in a deeper and darker stratum of the mind.

(v)

It is a signification of what Robinson believes to be the essential condition of life that his characters often embark on a journey on the psychological sea of self-discovery. As skillful

navigation may bring them to the island of integrated personality; so storms may drive them far from home, even to eternity; so their craft, too often a sieved hulk, may sink them - outward bound, but close to shore; so some do not purchase a passage, some do not have their fare; so many would not care to stow away.

The most dramatic moments in the poems, therefore, occur when experience is most psychically real. Robinson's achievement depends upon his ability to forge the full, personal impact of a character's experience, and simultaneously to analyse the experience objectively in relation to the unconscious 'well' from which it emanates. The author must have the advantage over his characters' inhibited self-perceptions at such moments. For example, the reader is asked to feel the intensity of soul-torment in a character's hallucination, and at the same time consciously distinguish it, as the character cannot until later - if at all - as hallucination. Robinson does not trifle with spectres that are illusionary, but is concerned with illusions and delusions that are psychic facts; and his most valid ideals are not conceived as flimsy adumbrations, but as psychic truth^s.

It is not until Cavender psychologically relives the murder of his wife that he recognizes her ghost to be a projection and voice from his own unconscious. Once he at last does so he is able to appreciate the importance and unimportance of his question concerning Laramie's infidelity, and to recognize that the answer

his unconscious mind had been attempting to evoke was the answer concerning not her hypothetical guilt but his own guilt. He accordingly finds peace in the recognition that he must reveal his guilt to the world, and he welcomes the world's sentence. The real salvage of personality thus occurs in the retrospective recognition of personal experience in relation to the demands of the obscure inner self, and in the necessary re-orientation of life in terms of self. Cavender attains selfhood at the end of the poem, because his unconscious striving for it had defeated his ego - conscious attempt to evade it, the evasions being symbolised by the asking of a wrong question (a 'beast' from the unconscious) which could not be answered.

'And this could not be peace that frightened him
 With wonder, coming like a stranger, slowly,
 Without a shape or name, and unannounced -
 As if a door behind him in the dark,
 And once not there, had opened silently,
 Or as if Laramie had answered him.' (p.1007)

That which comes is the stranger, the unknown and better and more complete self, and one of his psychological names is individuation. It comes from the unconscious, through the symbolic 'door behind him in the dark', to enlighten consciousness and psychic - physical experience; to invigorate the soul's tangible personality; and it comes to direct the ego towards its goal which, in Cavender's case, is attainable through admission and acceptance.

NOTES

- 1 The Integration of the Personality, p. 3.
- 2 Psychological Reflections. An Anthology of the Writings of C.G.Jung, Selected and Edited by Jolande Jacobi. (New York, Pantheon Books, 1953) - Bollingen Series XXXI -, 75.
- 3 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.p. 227-28.
- 4 Selected Letters, p.p. 165-66.
- 5 From "The Man Against the Sky", C.P., p.66.
- 6 See Barnard, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.p.220,300.
- 7 Talifer, C.P. p.1257.
- 8 King Jasper, C.P., 1472.
- 9 Reference to 'obscurity' is italicised in the following quotations from the text.
- 10 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.p. 48-49.
- 11 "Freud's Position in the History of Modern Thought". The Criterion, Vol. XII, No. XLIX (July, 1933), 567.
- 12 Waggoner, Hyatt, Howe, The Heel of Elohim, Science and Values in Modern American Poetry (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), 17.
- 13 Robinson denied that he was a philosopher; see Selected Letters, p.p. 165-66, 160.
- 14 The Heel of Elohim, p.32.
- 15 Selected Letters, p.p. 164-66.
- 16 See "For a Dead Lady", C.P., p.355.
- 17 Freud, Sigmund, Civilization and Its Discontents translated by Joan Riviere (London, Hogarth, 1930) - The International Psycho-analytical Library, No.17-, 14-15.
- 18 p. 13.
- 19 Brown, Norman, O., Life Against Death. The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), 160.

- 20 Ibid., p. 161
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid., p. 162
- 23 Eros and Civilization. (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), 231.
- 24 Psychological Reflections, p.24
- 25 Ibid., p. 34
- 26 Winters, Ivor, Edwin Arlington Robinson (Norfolk, Connecticut, New Directions Books, 1946) - The Makers of Modern Literature series -, 113.
- 27 Ledoux, "Psychologist of New England", p.4.
- 28 Psychological Reflections, p.209.
- 29 Freud, Sigmund, The Ego and the Id tr. by Joan Riviere (London, Hogarth, 1957) - The International Psychoanalytical Library, No.12 -,76.
- 30 Brown, Life Against Death, p.p.269-70.
- 31 Ibid., p. 162
- 32 Psychological Reflections, p.203.
- 33 Ibid., p.297.
- 34 Ibid., p. 41.
- 35 Evans, Nancy, "Edwin Arlington Robinson", Bookman Vol. LXXV, No. 7 (Nov., 1932), 678.
- 36 Psychological Reflections, p.204.
- 37 Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p.233
- 38 Ibid., p. 19.
- 39 See Evans, "Edwin Arlington Robinson", p.678.
- 40 Psychological Reflections, p.p.201-2
- 41 Ibid., p. 203
- 42 Ibid., p. 172
- 43 Ibid., p. 13

- 44 Ibid., p.p. 169-70.
- 45 For clarification of sixteenth-century implications of Shakespeare's concept see Bertram, Joseph, Conscience And The King (London, Chatto & Windus, 1953), p.p. 11-25.
- 46 Psychological Reflections, p.170
- 47 Ibid., p. 6.
- 48 Selected Letters, p. 164.
- 49 Psychological Reflections, p. 82
- 50 Ibid., p. 169.
- 51 Ibid., p. 172.
- 52 Selected Letters, p. 164
- 53 Psychological Reflections, p. 170
- 54 Ibid., p. 167.
- 55 Ibid., p. 127.
- 56 Ibid., p. 179.
- 57 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 218.
- 58 Ibid., p. 219.
- 59 Ibid., p. 221.
- 60 Ibid., p. 222.
- 61 Psychological Reflections, p. 88.
- 62 Ibid., p. 107.
- 63 Ibid., p. 101.
- 64 Ibid., p. 90.

Chapter 3

PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALOGIES

THE CLINICAL ANALOGY : Roman Bartholow

There are some ills that sooner will be dead
For our not vexing them with remedies;
And there are some that have their remedies
In their remedial evil. Let them fade;
And if they will die sometime, let them die,
Meanwhile our occupation is to live,
And somehow to be wise for a woman
Who, as we thought was here; and was not here.

- From Roman Bartholow.

(1)

The structure of the six narratives are psychoanalytical analogies, an obvious exemplar of which, in essentials of plot and the interaction of character, is Roman Bartholow. It is an attempted novel-in-verse, one hundred and twenty-four pages long, in which the past explores the psychological difficulties of four characters. The story involves the depletion of certain mental and emotional heritages; infidelity; the circumscription of vision; biological fate; the demolition of past tyrannies; the search for materials to construct an enduring edifice. What little action there is in the poem is a result of the triangular conflict, the conflict and the protagonist's adumbrations providing most of the substance of the poem.

Penn-Raven is an analogical clinician, or analyst, who enables Bartholow to recover from mental illness and who prepares him to face the realities of his life - namely, his unpractical bondage to ancestors

traditions and conventions that constrict his vision; and his futile marriage, founded on a lie, that is damaging to his intellectual maturity and emotional stability. Most of the poem, however, is concerned with the way in which Penn-Raven unintentionally obscures and indirectly precipitates the conditions conducive to the fulfilment of the treatment. He is a god to Bartholow at first, but fails to maintain the personal distance that austere office demands. He commits the cardinal sin of becoming too involved with his patient and, more disastrously, with his patient's susceptible wife. Bartholow is also a guilty, though therapeutically excusable, party in this involvement. He transfers his habit of idealizing, as Emery Neff correctly observes, from his wife to his mortal 'saviour'. Neff is also struck by the psychoanalytical significance of this when he conjectures : "one wonders if this transference to his analyst reflects Freud or the poet's intuition. 1.

Robinson's intuition certainly achieves the consistency of knowledge in these long poems, for there is ample evidence of the transference and resistance process. Cavender transfers his guilt to Laramie, and Matthias transfers his insecurity to Garth. During the process of individuation each of the main characters builds a fortress of resistances - Cavender, evasions against guilt; Matthias, degenerate escape against the 'tower' of accomplishment.

Apart from story and character-study, the clinical analogy is established through indirection and allusion. Penn-Raven 'studied' Gabrielle 'as a physician might'. (p.777) Umphraville, who

takes the stage at the beginning and the end of the narrative, also lays claim to analytical perception (conditioned by scholarly habits), declaring that he is "a reader" of "books that walk." (p.739)

Robinson, moreover, was occasionally inclined to tinge the 'analytical' with the 'mysterious', or the obscure, and it is not surprising to find the combination in Penn-Raven's analyst mask, or 'persona'. Robinson's play Van Zorn is comparable in this regard, because Van Zorn, who is extolled for his exaltation above fleshly hierarchies, for his mysterious extra-sensory perceptions, for his clinical subtlety, possesses the persona in perfect form whereas Penn-Raven has it in rudimentary form. Fantasy enshrouds the figure of Amaranth, another clinical analogue. However, his unquestionable authority is not at all psychically invalid when one remembers that he is an unconscious projection from Fargo's mind, a dream-figure whose authority the dreamer is in no position to question. Robinson, like Jung, believed that the healer of the mind should also be a saviour of the spirit.

The weaknesses in Roman Bartholow have an inhibiting effect upon the poem's "psychological truth" and its "keen analysis of the feeling²." The poem contains a great deal of conjectural complexity which distorts Penn-Raven's role of analyst, which in turn has been distorted because of inadequate explanation of Bartholow's past, mysterious sickness. Labyrinthine intellectuality obscures truth and analysis and shoulders the structural weaknesses; insufficient differentiation of the characters; projection of the poet's mental personality (philosophic sophistication at worst) on to his materials; artificial dialogue; and unduly long and over-subtle

argumentations.

Winters discusses the poem's "Robinsonian conversations", and claims that they are

"essentially Jamesian, and in a bad sense; their purpose is to make the characters appear devious and subtle and therefore, presumably, interesting; to keep up the reader's interest by means of indirection; to convey the subtle inflections of feeling experienced by the characters through letting them talk, not of their subject, but around their subject."³

According to this critic, the characters, the action, the subjects of conversation, the "feelings about subject", are generally not understandable. Neff, on the other hand, believes that three intensive readings of the poem affords a just reward in comprehension. Perhaps, after admitting the poem's defects, the painstaking reader will find his reward about half way between these positions.

(11)

Winters' allusion to the poet's habit of letting his characters talk is noteworthy. That Robinson failed fully to appreciate the difficulty in turning from poetic dialogue in shorter poems to the blank verse of common speech in a psychological novel in verse - and failed to deal with the difficulty, indicates artistic incertitude at the time the poem was written. Roman Bartholow belongs to the early period of the long poems, and apart from Captain Craig, published twenty-one years earlier, represents his first full-scale attempt at detailed psychological analysis of a group of characters

in a contemporary setting. Although formal representation of subject and the range of human behaviour are limited, however, certain psychological intentions are reasonably fulfilled. And in this success, the same technique of self-expression that gives rise to long-worded and over-subtle reflections and speeches is an important contributing factor.

The technique of letting characters talk, in Robinson's method, approximates in value to that of free association in the clinical situation. It provides almost the entire medium of communication in The Man Who Died Twice and the artificial medium of communication in Cavender's House. "Most people need a vis-à-vis, otherwise the basis of experience is not sufficiently real" and "the individual cannot "hear" himself and has no opportunity of contrasting himself with what is different from himself in order to ascertain what he himself really is." ⁴ This form of catharsis proves most beneficial to many of the characters whose loneliness reaches desperation point. Matthias talked to Timberlake; Nash confessed to the narrator and Nightingale to Malory.; Gabrielle and Bartholow confess their inner natures to Penn-Raven. When Penn-Raven proves to be an insufficient counsellor, Gabrielle has no one to turn to and regards ~~death~~ ~~as~~ death as inevitable; Bartholow has Umphrville to talk with (he went to see him in the middle of the night) and regards life as inevitable. Although Cavender is in fact only talking to himself, and it may be true that in severe cases "confessions made to One's secret self generally have little or no effect, whereas confessions made to another are much more

5

promising", during the crucial stages he regards his projection as another person. He learns to appreciate the psychological truism that "It makes an enormous difference whether I admit my guilt only to myself or to another" and resolves to admit it to the law.

The technique, designed to achieve insight through the verbal release of self, has to comply with the broad dictates of realism in Roman Bartholow, which it sometimes fails to do; whereas in Cavender's House the same restriction does not apply because the realism is entirely psychological, and its appeal entirely imaginative. The technique is indispensable to Cavender's soul-searching and to the successive revelation of the dark rooms in the house of his mind. Free association is permissible under a prevailing momentary suspension of disbelief.

The cathartic need to talk is vital to the characters in Roman Bartholow. Umphrville the recluse, a study in sublimation, finds a necessary outlet in conversation with Bartholow. Gabrielle and Bartholow talk to each other as a substitute for not loving each other (a typical Robinsonian displacement from the lower to the higher), and need to talk separately with Penn-Raven to clarify the meaning of their intimate relationships with him. Thus, the conversations, for the most part, revolve around 'the Raven'. But he proves a weak link in this chain of personal relationships.

(111)

Conrad Aiken, in his novel Great Circle, has dealt delicately and impressively with the breakdown of the marital relationship

and with the character and role of the analyst. Robinson doesn't succeed as well, mainly because he stresses too heavily the intellectual man at the expense of the natural man. Not even a roomful of celibates, academics, sophisticated lady hunters of culture, or frustrated friars would talk like the characters in Roman Bartholow. And it is with this thought in mind that the following interpretation of the psychoanalytical analogy is offered.

Jung has declared that the psychotherapist:

"must be absolutely clear that the treatment of the soul of a patient is a relationship in which the doctor is just as much involved as the patient. A real treatment of the soul can only be individual, and therefore even the best technique is of purely relative value."

6

This applies to the situation in the poem. Penn-Raven is an apparently successful "soul-practitioner". We are told at the commencement of the narrative that he "found the soul in Bartholow that ailed him" and "healed it". (p.735) But by remaining on as a guest (he repeatedly said he had stayed too long) he was the source of provocation which put Bartholow's healed soul to the test of reality. Penn-Raven's weaknesses are exposed for what they were - ambiguous intruders into the lives of Bartholow and Gabrielle.

The narrative reveals the individual treatment, through stress to strength, of Bartholow's soul. Gabrielle is the

unfortunate go-between in the process of Bartholow's enlightenment, in the revelation that she cannot share it, and in the expose of Penn-Raven's flawed soul. In relationships where the souls of people are at stake, a person in psychological authority takes on a great deal of ethical and moral responsibility. Not only must he recognize the transference process, but he should also make it possible to remove from himself all sense of dependence which the patient feels towards him. Bartholow and Gabrielle became over dependent on Penn-Raven. She stresses their dependency when she asks her husband:

"Without him,

What else might you not be without this morning?

And what would you be doing now all alone -

With only me? And what would you be seeing?" (p.756)

By remaining with them Penn-Raven ensured dependence and thus neglected his responsibility. By remaining, he complicated the lives of all and invoked changes. Gabrielle tells him:

"I wonder if by some capricious chance

They may be rather yours than mine - these changes;

For surely you are not as you were then,

More than the Roman Bartholow I married

Is now as he was when you came to him.

You made him over, but I'm asking yet,

How such an awkward mingling of the soul

And body as there is in your medicine

Had virtue to restore him. All the same,

I would not have you think me credulous,

Incurably, for I know as well as you

That his illumination cannot last." (p. 779)

But it is not so much the practice as the practitioner that is at fault; for it is apparent that Penn-Raven's achievement with Bartholow was by no means negligible. Moreover, he continues to reveal throughout qualities of insight pertaining to Gabrielle and Bartholow which are often as pertinent as they are diffuse.

On the other hand, and in the general evaluation, Penn-Raven failed in the role of analyst. It is as if Robinson makes an example of him in order to stress the more genius required in one who possesses natural ability to heal wounds of deep, psychic nature. If, on one level, his character is a satire on fraudulent practitioners of clinical Freudianism (with which America had experience at the time the poem was written), then Penn-Raven's sexual immorality also serves this lighter purpose, as well as the more meaningful one of revealing its consequences in highly personal relationships.

It is possible, then, that just as Jeffers portrays the private impurity which may underlie the psychology of religious aspiration, and Saviour-ism, in Barclay (The Women at Point Sur); so Robinson analyses the contemptible effects of private impurity in the personality of the twentieth-century "soul-practitioner".

Penn-Raven failed to reconcile the goal of his vision with his constitutional frailties, and did not achieve that "thoroughly earnest psychoanalytical education of his own personality" which is indispensable to the analyst. "Supernally wise about others, himself he cannot save, and his tears as he departs remorsefully to resume his nomadic existence moves even the injured Bartholow."⁷ Possessing the skill to analyse others, he was constricted in his power for good (there was eternal innocence in his eyes) by his inability to develop his own character.

Jung has written that

"the art of psychotherapy requires that the therapist should be in possession of an ultimate conviction which can be stated, which is credible and defensible, and which has proved its validity by the fact that it either has resolved any neurotic dissociations of his own or has never let them develop. A therapist who has a neurosis does not deserve the name, for it is not possible to bring the patient to a more advanced stage than one has reached oneself."⁸

Penn-Raven, however, does seem to possess 'credible and defensible convictions' about life and the soul; he suffers not so much from his inability to live up to his convictions because of a definite neurosis, but because of some Hawthorne-like, archetypal streak of defection. Romance and sentiment, rather than realism, vitiate his psychological make-up. There is an unfathomable intangibility, a 'slow unconsciousness' in his eyes, a primeval

innocence and a primeval fall at the back of his intellectual

endowments. His neurosis, as such, seems to be eye born out

of human history, rather than out of his individual history

about which the poet is non-committal. There is the same kind

of generality of detection about him as there is about Clavering.

Was Penn-Raven a Clavering? 'a flawed instrument that fell while

it was being made', as Unphraville suggests? (see p. 854)

I wonder if he saw too much,

10

Or if he looked one way too long?

Quite often Robinson was unable to resist the greater inclusiveness
of the general, cosmic collective unconscious with which to embrace
his conceptions of soul-dilemmas and flawed personality in poetic

meaning.

(14)

Roman Bartholow describes the neurosis of the human relationship.

Penn-Raven's part in this has already been alluded to, but the

significance of Gabrielle and Bartholow have yet to be discussed.

Gabrielle is able to assess more readily and dispassionately the

failure of her marriage and the flaws in 'the Raven's' character.

She has known both men as woman to man. Hence her realisations

and insights, profound and genuine, display the validity of an original
perspective. Bartholow's vision is temporarily clouded by emotional

prejudices; firstly in his exaggerated feeling of gratitude,

secondly, in his blind eruption of hatred. Yet his eventual

perceptions, springing from a firmer core, are more solid.

However, they are the nucleus of a future personality whereas Gabrielle's belong to the central part of the narrative: Hence she is more likely to retain the reader's sympathy and attention.

This natural empathy is evident, for example, from part of a long conversation with Bartholow. In a significant passage Robinson equates the yearning of the feminine instincts with the egoism of the husband in a formula of frustration and dissatisfaction; but hers is the poignancy, his the coldness. Realising the dependence of the patient ^{upon the analyst of the patient} to the analyst, and aware of her secondary importance, she says to Bartholow:

"And have you not the Raven? Without him ...

... what would you be seeing?

I'm sure that you would not be standing here,

Or seeing here such a pretty fire of ruins,

I told you all about the skeletons

That we should be by the ^{is} time without him.

Would any children take the place of him?

Would you exchange for them the miracle

Of your release, rebirth, or what you call it?

I'm almost wholly certain you would not.

Let me be stricken only with a face

A little harder for your contemplation,

And I'll see new love running like a hero

Out of a haunted tomb."

(p.756)

Gabrielle exposes the falling ^{away} of the assumption that a new-born love exists between herself and Bartholow now he is better, and she is aware that her beauty (Penn-Raven said she was "too beautiful

to be alive") was the lure, the unimpeachable illusion and adornment, for Bartholow's refinement. Her most significant announcement, however, is made in spite of her husband, and one feels, in spite of the poet. This is her reference to "children".

It is surely unusual that, in Robinson's poetry, the consequences of marriage and love between the sexes are generally negative so far as the production of offspring is concerned. It must be assumed, as there is no suggestion to the contrary, that Bartholow and Gabrielle, Matthias and Natalie, Cavender and Laramie, Merlin and Vivian, Avon and his wife, to mention a few representative examples, were child^{less}. One wonders, therefore, if Robinson was so preoccupied with the fate of the individual soul that he did not want to be diverted from the theme into considerations of natural exigencies and normal responsibilities; or whether some private, inhibiting factor influenced him. So far as the first hypothesis is concerned, it may be argued that the poet preferred to so demude a character in his psychological plight and confront his ego with soul-light or soulless darkness, that he considered that final questions alone provided sufficient material for dramatic representation. In Roman Bartholow and Matthias at the Door, for instance, suicide represents the logical extension of the individual fate of the wives in relation to the failure of love and their inferior visions. Accordingly, it is possible that the logic of this theme would be distorted if they were provided with reasons - such as love of, and responsibility to,

children - why they should not terminate their life.

Undoubtedly, many of Robinson's characters would be more realistic if they had to cope with more purely mortal responsibilities, and provided less evidence of sexlessness. But Robinson was, nevertheless, an astute psychologist and a profound observer of human life.

The second hypothesis, concerning the projection into the poems of the poet's private motives, therefore seems worthy of consideration.

Children are the symbolic reminders of sexual union; hence Gabrielle's mention of them is a subtle reminder to Bartholow of the sexlessness of their marriage. Her instinctual yearning is understandable and so, accordingly, is her affair with Penn-Raven. The predominance of frustration seems to point to that puritanical trait of New Englandism which often appears in Robinson's writing. The numerous childless and unhappy marriages, the love triangles, and the memory of the lost love that ought to have been, but never was, consummated admittedly testify to the universal experience that "The love problem is part of mankind's toll of suffering", but probably relate as well to a personal repression of the sexual instinct and to personal childhood memories: Robinson too often forgets the other side of the issue that "and nobody should be
11
ashamed that he must pay his tribute."

It appears that these private factors affected the poet's selection of themes, even allowing for his reasonable attitude that sex, for the most part, could be taken for granted. It is

perhaps noteworthy that Robinson's fullest expression of natural love is achieved in the Arthurian poems, in which love and story are borrowed from tradition; and while the poet's tremendous originality and refusal to ascribe love to a magic potion instead of individual passion is praiseworthy, Robinson's characters have a tendency to symbolise and 'talk' their passion rather than experience it biologically. Thus, it does seem significant that biographical details of the poet's life exclude mention of any amorous episode. It appears that women entered into the poet's life as friends, maternal and intellectual, and not as lovers. Moreover, Robinson had bitter memories of a shy and frustrated childhood. As a boy he seemed most happy when alone or in the company of one or two trusted friends.

12

"On the Night of a Friend's Wedding", written when the poet was a young man and one of his earliest publications, and "Aunt Imogen",¹³ which many critics presume to be an autobiographical inversion, lend support to the present argument.

Robinson was often highly, and occasionally morbidly, conscious - particularly when a young man - that he had dedicated his soul and life to his art to the exclusion of the normal ways, presumably marriage, and contingencies of men. He envisaged himself as always and ultimately alone, with the possible exception of 'six or eight Good friends who most ingeniously prate About my songs'. (p.95) It is natural therefore, that when one of these friends marries he should feel the infliction of the sternness and suffering of his dedication, and of the immutable separability

of him who writes from them who 'prate'.

'But everything is all askew to-night -
 As if the time were come, or almost come,
 For their untenanted mirage of me
 To lose itself and crumble out of sight,
 Like a tall ship that floats above the foam
 A little while, and then breaks utterly.' (p.95)

The "tall ship" of phallic despair has such a Yeatsian quality about it that it is impossible not to observe how much, how ironically, Robinson sounds like the older Yeats when, tragically welcoming senility, he opens the sonnet with

'If ever I am old, and all alone,
 I shall have killed one grief, at any rate...' (p.95)

"Aunt Imogen" portrays the frustration of a life without conjugal love. Aunt Imogen, sensitively portrayed as 'living down ... The penance of a dream' (p.186), is frustrated and repressed because she has now known love and has no children. With 'no love Save borrowed love' (p.183), she sublimates her own suffering and emptiness in the company of her sister's children, whom she visited 'for four weeks In fifty-two'. (p.185)

'There was the feminine paradox - that she
 Who had so little sunshine for herself
 Should have so much for others. How it was
 That she could make, and feel for making it,
 So much joy for them, and all along
 By covering, like a scar, and while she smiled,

That hungering incompleteness and regret -
 That passionate ache for something of her own,
 For something of herself - she never knew.' (p.186)

Although repression is often so strong that many of Robinson's men are over-ascetic and unsympathetic to a woman's needs, some of his women, in the strength of their 'passionate ache', represent the other side of the poet's personality, the natural side that fights against repression. And there is a great warmth of love between the sexes in the fine lyrical moments, as in parts of the Arthurian poems, of his best poetry. However, the women are often forced into infidelity and regret it bitterly, and the conflict is too often resolved against nature. As in the case of Poe, morbid repressed desire may be revealed (for instance Cavender's necrophilic attempts to 'touch' the projection of his wife), or more usually, sublimated and idealised. Such idealism is symbolised in Merlin as 'the torch of woman' and in King Jasper as an unconvincing conception of intellectual beauty personified in Zoe. On the other hand, Robinson reveals himself as an honest and well-balanced observer; he does not shun realism simply for the sake of idealism, as his invocation of the force of lust and debauchery^e in The Man Who Died Twice indicates.

In the long poems, included in the present section, the natural instincts are generally admitted into contexts of severe frustration. And, on occasions, Robinson's attitude to the

human relationship (however profound his psychology of conflict and frustration) conceals, perhaps, what it is afraid to reveal.

Robinson's preoccupation with, and scrutiny of, the love relationship, is exemplified in an actual episode reported by Louis Ledoux, the poet's friend, who writes:

"Once he thought that he had discovered a small rift in the lute of married happiness which was being played by a couple he knew, and he announced his discovery so triumphantly to them that they were able to see how they had been studied and how powerful [sic] his imagination working had watched the rift he had discerned widen through the years that were to come, until it spoiled their music."

But Robinson's imagination could go awry. For example, Matthias, Bartholow, and Cavender are said to be complete in the wordly sense (wealth, a beautiful wife and so on). Yet their wordly happiness was, surely, far from complete, for none of them possessed children to inherit their wealth and perpetuate their name and tradition. Another peculiarity is that these husbands seem to take an inordinately long time in discovering that their wives had stopped loving them (if they had ever loved them at all !) years before. Moreover, Robinson was inclined to treat infidelity and adultery symbolically - for example, as blind regression and the extinction of values - rather than realistically in terms of sexual need. Cavender murdered his wife purely on suspicion of infidelity, whilst Natalie was actually unfaithful in thought only.

Paradoxically, however, the poet's imaginative portrayal of personal relationships was often, in particulars and in a general sense, psychologically astute. Most perceptive is his revelation of the conflict between self and selflessness (Roman Bartholow, Matthias at the Door) and between carnality and the creative spirit (The Man Who Died Twice) - themes which invite comparison with D.H. Lawrence. An example is to be found in Gabrielle's analysis of her relationship with Bartholow. 'Her eyes were hot With too much gazing into a dark fire' ; she recalls the past that cannot be given back:

'And if a man

Had suffered much to see, had not a woman
Suffered as much not seeing? Gabrielle,
Recalling how the sunshine wakened her
Upon the morning of her wedding day,
Remembered that she went to sleep again;
And now she wondered, in a misty way,
What might have come to pass if they had given
Themselves back to each other before chains
They might have broken then, or broken since,
Had held them, and so given back all these years
That now could not be given ... (p.737)

... the strands

That once were soft, were sodden now, and frayed
Beyond all tying.' (p.738)

The sexes are chained together, to the degradation of self, Robinson seems to say, instead of being tied together softly with flexible and celestial cords.

Gabrielle's introspections, shortly before her death, provide the most human and sensitive section of the narrative, as well as the best verse. Her anguish is convincing, she speaks from the depths of her feminine being, and there is a Shakespearian grandeur, clarity and simplicity in her thoughts and speech. She is like Cleopatra when she says

"My life is less

To me to-night than I may give a stranger

Out of my purse, to keep him warm and fed

Till he forgets me." (p.776)

And when, prior to drowning herself, she feels,

'as if a ghost had come

Between her and her warm eyes in the mirror,

The fall of the first shadow she had thrown

So long before, and so unconsciously,

Over a man's illusions and his life,

And over hers.' (p.804)

The desecrated 'alter' of womanhood, her tragedy is her non-experience of the 'great love' for which she had been instinctually and physically and femininely prepared. The whole frustration of her situation is deftly symbolised in the numerous allusions to the 'few clumsy moths indignantly Refusing to be free' (p.733), which are at the window.

These 'moths plunged and whirled eternally, Torn by their own salvation.' (p.p.803-4)

The conflict between man and woman, negation and desire, is also portrayed in the doomed and degenerating relationship of Natalie and Matthias. Faced with the failure of their love, they continue to live together, but there is 'inviolable fire' that divides them like a knife. A sickly frustration gradually corrupts Matthias.

'An intangible,
Untarnishable soul of something fine
Was wearing off; and in his looks and words
A primitive pagan rawness of possession
Soiled her and made her soul and body sick.' (p.1121)

Natalie defeats his rationalisation that he "may as well have" her body "while it lasts". (p.1123) Her belief, however, is not that human relationships fail because of innate irascibility, but as a result of psychological ignorance and paucity of reason. She says, in the Robinsonian manner,

"The trouble with you,
And me, and a few millions who are like us,
Is that we live so long to know so little,
And are not willing then to know ourselves". (p.1124)

(v)

The father-image represents another thematic influence in Robinson's work, and reflects a personal factor at the back of

Robinson's attitude to sex, the family, and personal relationships.

To begin with, the God-image of the immortal father has intruded into Robinson's work, apart from his idea of ultimate purpose and ultimate ameliorism, as an awful and remote being. It is evident in the impressionable consciousness of the young poet, who published in The Children of the Night volume a sonnet entitled "The Dead Village" that concludes with the line

'God frowned, and shut the village from His sight.' (p.88)

Again, it may be inherent in a general principle of creation or purpose. Robinson's antagonism to childhood suffering and faithless mating adheres to his austere and ambiguous idealisation of the creation principle. Thus, he says in "The Man Against the Sky" that the propagation of the species is only justifiable if man has faith in cosmic reason; but if this faith is lost, as explained in "Lost Anchors", then the idea of creation by propagation is unjustifiable: the 'mother should have had no sons'. (p.578)

Robinson has expressed the belief that many people might have been better if ^{they} had ~~be~~ not been born into a suffering 'life-burdened world'; and it is not unwarrantable, in this connection, to allude to a hypothetical subconscious morbid tendency to idealise the unborn and deathly condition:

"For all must yet be done by the unborn

And by the dead together before life

May know itself to be alive." (p.830)

This could denote an escape from the male progenitor to

the refuge of unconsciousness, the womb of all night. Life, however, is the impersonality of release from the womb; the impersonal idea is extolled as freedom from male domination in terms of an ambiguously masculine symbol. The symbol is the tower of self which Matthias is to create. Its essential quality is impersonality. It will stand alone. It will not tyrannise. The male principle and especially the male principle of personalistic creation thwarted are often felt to be cold, and sometimes are even callous and diabolical. Some of Robinson's characters stand alone in a rejection of fatherhood; but even this does not necessarily signify escape from the father image.

There is a certain aridity of character in Bartholow when he prefers his rebirth to giving his wife children, even as there is a more pathetic aridity, resulting from frustrated passion, in the character of Nightingale. Hence the significance of Nightingale's ruination of his friend resulting in the death of Agatha and her child. The malevolence of the male principle (or father-image) is also to be seen in the way it directly or indirectly injures or destroys the female principle (or mother-image). In Ameranth the former is symbolised by worthless inventiveness, and in Cavender's House by egoistic jealousy: Ipswich causes the death of his wife, and Cavender murders his. The cruelty of the image is vouchsafed.

The theme of the father-image is linked with the atavistic theme in Roman Bartholow. Bartholow's house is an 'ancestral prison' and the gaoler is the ancestral father, symbolically present

in the portrait of the man who built the house - Bartholow's grandfather. When Penn-Raven first examined the portrait he told Bartholow:

"If there is much of him in you,
Your soul had better never been aroused.
Now show me your grandmother, if you please,
And then your mother. Never mind the rest,
For you are not the son of any father." (p.734)

This is a direct enough repulsion of the father-image and is substantiated by Bartholow when he replies, "But you are right":

"My father was to me a mighty stranger -
Fearsome, but always on the side of right
As he discerned it." (p.735)

Penn-Raven points out to Bartholow that his weaknesses stem from the male tradition, but he is fortunate in being able to evade it, primarily because he belongs to the female side of the family (mother-image).

When Bartholow attacks Penn-Raven the latter accordingly tells him that his "aboriginal necessities" had thereby experienced "adequate Eruption and release" and merely signified "a familiar atavism, By no means yours alone." (p.813) That this atavism is allied with the father-image is made clear by Penn-Raven's observation, "you have in you more of your grandfather Than first one had imagined." (p.813) Penn-Raven observes psychologically:

"If we consider
The many that have been alive to make us,
And are so many parts of each of us,

The qualified assent of our perception
 Will hardly measure either up or down,
 I fear, exclusively to our illusions." (p.814)

There is a positive, freedom-finding value in the catharsis of Bartholow's attack; for the assault signifies the first realisation of release from Penn-Raven who, in the clinical, transference situation, had become the father-confessor prototype upon whom Bartholow had become dependent in the way a frightened infant clings to its parent. Thus, Bartholow's emergence into selfhood doubly signifies freedom from the father-image and freedom to attain the impersonal ideal. The latter may also entail freedom of avoidance whereby the self is free to avoid becoming such an image. Bartholow may honour "friendly reticence" and "humane brevity", but will avoid reversion to the atavistic jungle of human relationships where people are "anthropophagous hypocrites", instead of "honest cannibals", ^dfeeling one upon the other.

It is interesting to record a passage from Hagedorn's biography of the poet in view of this compulsive pre-occupation with the father-image. The episode referred to in the quotation occurred shortly before the poet's death and about the time he was writing *Amaranth and King Jasper. Hagedorn writes:

"A new friend, Merrill Moore, a physician who was also a poet of individual talent and astonishing fecundity, watched over him with

the tenderness of a friend, the understanding of a poet, the penetrating curiosity of a psychoanalyst; noting how constained this poet was, in body and spirit, drawing him out, hoping to relax the tensions which kept his organs from normal functioning. A deep resentment against a father who had not been a father lingered in Robinson's mind and he spoke occasionally in parables that revealed an inner disquiet."

15

The endeavour has been made in the above pages to suggest the thematic consistency, without doing an injustice to the complexity, or without forgetting the confusion, of Robinson's analysis of the neurosis of the human relationship. His material in the hands of a Tennessee Williams or an Angry Young Man would no doubt prove dangerously popular, sentimental, conventional, and tiresome. The trend of this kind of analysis has become so common in the popular idiom of to-day, that it provokes, even, a reaction in the same idiom; a reaction symbolised by the accusing label that reads "sick". The trend of 'sick' writing, which has now a long history, was anathema to a poet of Robinson's sense of bardic dedication. So conscientiously does he elevate his theme, one forgets that, had he not been so serious an artist, such situations as those in Roman Bartholow and The Man Who Died Twice might easily have degenerated into the trenchant sickness of much

purely idiomatic writing. The sickness of Robinson's isolated figures (Lilliputian ^{Alab's} ~~Abbs~~) is genuinely spiritual and psychological, in contrast to the sickness of many prototypes in contemporary literature who, almost exclusively sordid and intellectually moribund, lacking robust vigour, appeal fraudulently to psychologisms. These latter types are thought to be wounded if they subscribe to a recipe of superimposed futility embracing a sponge of eroticism. Squeeze them and they are as dry as Eliot's "bones". Yet critics castigate Robinson for delving beyond the psychological pale, for pessimism, for adumbrations of futility! The point is not that some of his characters 'go to the devil', but when they 'go to the devil' they generally do so with a heightened consciousness of life. In many of Robinson's poems sex, love, and enjoyment may be outweighed by suffering and severity of outlook, but it is a thoughtful and sincere thesis honorably argued.

Most of Robinson's major characters are prepared to accept some moral responsibility for what they are, and if they are dissected with a clinical scalpel, their psychology is none the less plausible; nor does their soul escape in the process.

The poet discovers that what is often taken for the truth is merely the truth on crutches. He reflects unashamedly upon the internal, as well as the external, graveyard and faces squarely what he considers to be the hollow optimism of much graveyard philosophy, and is prepared to answer Gray:

"There's a casting

Of too much hallowed and long-honoured nonsense
 Over the names and skeletons of all those
 Who might as well have been George Washington
 As not." (p.1352)

Once his characters have understood something of the meaning of life, their wisdom often denotes an escape from the clinical abyss. It may be the wisdom of Fernando Nash, for example; an acceptance of reality and a determination to subdue self-pity and self-excuse. The narrator endeavoured to find an excuse for Nash's fall on the grounds of his personal psychology; but Nash shook his head ...

'I had made several entrances already
 With my determinism, and always failed.
 He would have none of it. He was to blame,
 And it was only right that he should lose
 What he had won too late.' (p.956)

THE PROJECTION ANALOGY : Cavender's House

What I tried to do, of course, was to create an extension of a projection of Cavender's own mind that could stand off and examine him ...

- E.A. Robinson

(1)

Cavender's House is structurally different to Roman Bartholow, even though aspects of the clinical analogy are thematically significant. It is based on a different kind of analogy that is also one of the most important modes of unconscious dynamics : projection.

The theme of Cavender's House, which analyses a flawed mind with the perspicacity of the New England introspective mentality, is not without predecessors in New England literature. Conrad Aiken described the theme as "such a one as Henry James or Hawthorne might have used for a long short story." The plot is practically as succinct as his summary of it:

"a man who has murdered his wife, in^a panic of jealous suspicion, argues the case with his conscience taking the form of his wife's ghost: and this debate, in Cavender's "house", or mind, is the poem."

16

This is a psychological plot with universal as well as traditional appeal. It is only necessary to substitute antiquity's darkness of the underworld for the psychological age's darkness of the unconscious to appreciate the primordial significance of the theme.

Freud, in speaking of symbolism in dreams, affords us an interesting parallel in the story of Periander of Corinth and his wife Melissa - a story which features identical elements of tormented questioning and jealous rage in connection with infidelity : "According to the version of Herodotus, the tyrant abjured the shade of his wife, whom he had loved passionately but had murdered out of jealousy, to tell him something about herself ..."

17

Significantly, Aiken did not regard Cavender's House as "a glorified ghost story", a mistake made by some reviewers and refuted by the author, for we know from an earlier exposition that Aiken applied special reservations when speaking of Robinson's ghosts. He explained that they were not supernatural or frivolous agents, but subtle psychological symbols:

"ghosts have figured in his work from the very outset - ghosts, that is, as the symbols of human fears or loves, ghosts as the plausible and tangible personifications of those varieties of self-tyranny which nowadays we call psychotic. For this sort of ghost there need be no justification, no more than for the ghost of Banquo."

18

Ghosts appearing unexpectedly from the darkness of an unknown region (the unconscious mind) are suitable metaphors of psychic forces, because of their elusive foreboding, and pathoscopic qualities. They inspire fear because of their strangeness and unreality, yet presumably have authoritative experience of things outside consciousness.

Hence, once admitted into the conscious field of vision (it is difficult for a weakened ego to censor their admittance), they lose the original character of their dormant state and become attached to emotional stimuli. By contrast, their tangibility and rationality appear transparent; viz. their metaphorical appearances. They are projections, or projected entities, par excellence. Robinson has a vast metaphorical range of ghosts (examples are given in ~~to the contexts~~); but the ghost in Cavender's House is a more imposing figure than any of these. It is a ghost in the grand manner and on a symbolic scale.

Cavender's ghost, forged from the recesses of a twelve-year brooding, is a dramatically represented image of his dead wife. As an image, Laramie is merely the memory of Laramie, but as a entity she is a projection and a voice from Cavender's psyche. Robinson outlined the psychological ground - plan of his ghost to Rollo Brown. Correcting the reviewers' false impression that the poem was "a glorified ghost story", the poet drew his friend's attention to one review which did please him. "Here is one who got me!" Robinson remarked, but added:

"It would have been more accurate if he had said that what so many are content to call the ghost of Cavender's dead wife was a projection of Cavender's own mind ...

What I tried to do, of course, was to create an extension or projection of Cavender's own mind that could stand off and examine him without mercy - and without ordinary hate."

19

This is a most significant admission, and it is one which the present

interpretation endeavours to illuminate by indicating the subtlety, complexity, and creativity of Robinson's presentation of this psychological phenomenon.

Robinson's structural handling of the poem, in so far as it serves his purpose of setting the action within Cavender's mind, is superb. The portentous reality of the unconscious is brilliantly conveyed and enables the reader to distinguish the mental process whereby unconscious materials are brought into consciousness under the coercive will of a stronger personality, and are evaluated by an ego with a more positive purpose. The atmosphere of psychic dimensions is effectively evoked as a result of house, darkness and light symbolism and an individual vocabulary of the psyche that is founded on the repeated use of key words in psychological contexts. Such key words occur in the following contexts: broad psychological entities such as "fear", "evil", "hate"; ideational entities such as "doubt", "fate", "necessity", "change"; psychotic entities such as "madness", "guilt", "remorse". Key words are often the nuclei of analysis. For instance, when Cavender declares "I was a fool to dream, Who cannot sleep" (p.973), he acknowledges the neurotic grip of unconscious forces, and realises his weakness in falling between the vice of uncontrollable impulse. Another example is to be found in a confession of confusion that suspiciously alludes to frustration, repression and diluted masculinity. He tells his projection:

"There are some women

Whose privilege is to treasure and conserve
 Their mystery, and to make as much of it
 As heaven may give them leave and means, But you,
 Having so perilous abundance of it,
 Made for yourself a peril of its abuse -
 Unconscious of how near you lived with madness
 In one who could not know." (p.984)

His not knowing concerning Laramie's infidelity, like his frustrated desire to touch her image, possibly conceals a remorseful retrospection of uncertainty concerning his power and sensitivity as a lover. If such is the case, Cavender is by no means an exception among Robinson's gallery of male lovers.

(11)

The sense of the unconscious pervades Cavender's House. From its obscure deep and dark the projection attains synthetic reality until, in the visibility of 'moonlight' consciousness, it attains plastic form in the person of Laramie. This projective technique, having been indicated in the experiments of the earlier Avon's Harvest, proves its artistic justification in Cavender's House.

The phenomenon of projection is part of the natural life of the mind, and has been defined as "the unconscious, automatic, extrapolation of a psychic content into an object, as an attribute of which it then appears to us."²⁰ That which is projected generally

signifies an unconscious happening not grasped by consciousness. This happening, in Cavender's mind, is a process of guilt and irony, suggesting re-orientation through acceptance of the justice of torment and the uselessness of doubt, that has become sufficiently powerful to be projected into consciousness in a self-accusatory capacity. Thus, Cavender's experience exemplifies the psychoanalytical belief that projection involves the unknown in man and that one of its purposes is redemption of the individual. Cavender's projection proves a successful means of helping him find what redemption there is available to him.

Robinson's method of narration in Cavender's House subscribes to the dictates of psychological realism. He tells the story from the point of view of Cavender's psychic experiences so that the reader's widening perception and enlightenment enlarges and evolves at a similar rate to Cavender's. This is precisely what has upset many critics, yet it is precisely what constitutes the artistic merit of the poem. The reader's experience, of course, is not completely equated with Cavender's, for the reader possesses the advantage of being able to apply his own psychological acumen to the situation. He can better understand Cavender's ambivalence towards Laramie and ignorance of her nature, while at the same time sharing the gradual realisation of her psychological significance. On the other hand, the reader retains the outsider's advantage in being able to appreciate more fully Laramie's character as a projected entity. Near the end of the poem, when Laramie makes it clear that she is a projection, she says:

"There is in me no answer to your question;
 There is in me only as much of me
 As you have brought with you and made of me,
 How shall I tell you what you do not know,
 Knowing no more myself? Laramie's eyes,
 If they are seeing you now, wherever they are
 Have pity in them, I hope, I do not see them -
 Wherever they are - and so I cannot tell you". (p.1003)

There is an implicit conundrum here: as Laramie is a part of Cavender (himself addressing himself), she could not understand her function unless he himself had pre-consciously become aware of it. The reader, therefore, must appreciate the objective clarity and theoretical assurance of the phenomenon, without feeling deprived of realism, in the knowledge that Cavender's understanding is largely intuitive and still dawning.

Cavender's realisations are tenacious, and will not be denied. In successive blows they destroy defensive attitudes until the old personality of dissension and "dissonance" finally capitulates:

"You are a living dissonance yourself,
 And you have made of grief and desperation
 Something of Laramie that had her voice,
 There's yet another voice for you to hear..." (p.1003)

"You jealous hound, you murderer, you poor fool!
 You are listening to yourself now, Cavender;
 And Laramie, let us hope, is where no sound
 Of this will find her." (p.1004)

And with the words of the Laramie-projection still echoing in Cavender's brain, the author writes:

'It was intolerable
To know their warning told in his own voice,
But he must shrink and hear them. It was foul
And perilous to be greeted by one's face,
But he must look. He looked, and there was nothing. (p.1006)

Having been confronted with his subconscious self and with potential madness, Cavender thus succeeded in passing the test of sanity. The projection ceases to exist, becoming 'nothing' once it has served its purpose. Its truth dissolves into the substance of the new self. Living assonance, 'peace', has supplanted "living dissonance".

(iii)

In obeying an inescapable and automatic compulsion to return to his house (Laramie 'had called him back again'), Cavender proved himself a living acknowledgment of the inexpugnable laws of life and of the unconscious.

'The place ... had compelled him for so long
To come so far, by the old law that hides
In whatsoever of design there is
In time and triumph.'
21 (p.962)

His wandering journey back to the place where he murdered his wife twelve years earlier is actually a psychological journey back to the house of his mind as it was then. During the interval Cavender had repressed (chemistry of fate), as far as possible, his responsibility

pertaining to the crime, but had been inextricably fixated ('necessity') to that occasion by his haunted desire to know whether Laramie had been unfaithful. His crime had been repressed and elongated into 'the old shadow' and his state of neurotic dying is due to the shadow's want of light. (Repression is psychological dying, and Cavender 'was tired Of dying.') His 'question' to Laramie signifies a hopeless, ravaging quest to unburden guilt and justify aggression. But a degree of rationality and an obscure belief in some God or purpose prevent his neurosis from sliding into the psychosis of self-justification, a condition in which he could permanently convince himself that Laramie, not he, was the guilty party. His failure to achieve this -- failure to repress questioning, doubt, and remorse, failure to avoid the extremes of anxiety -- complies with the process Freud describes as the slow return of the repressed.

Cavender had made a slow return, indeed, before the repressed revealed itself. Laramie is the symbolic revelation, the projection being a significant index of the malaise; the repressed had broken out in an attempt to protect the ego from total collapse. Laramie thus reminds Cavender that forgetfulness is impossible and no amount of repression ("queen of all forgetters") could erase the memory of what happened:

"The queen of all forgetters

Would certainly be taxed and overladen

... if she forgot what I remember." (p.974)

The introductory stage in the establishment of the autonomous projection was, as we have seen, Cavender's compulsion to return. This induced a state of mind, a momentary suspension of disbelief, relevant to the materialisation of Laramie in the dark room of Cavender's pre-conscious mind. Cavender speaks on one occasion of "the unpleasant well of my own thoughts" (p.970) (an agreeably accurate summation of the Freudian unconscious), and well he may, because it is in its depths that the personality of the projection took shape. Laramie says rightly that she is not a dream. She is more than that, and represents psychic processes, transformed and united symbolically, and projected into the outer world.

At her first appearance in the beginning of the narrative, the poet infers subtly but fairly that she is a projection. He makes it clear that she is a part of Cavender himself, an extrapolated part which has been repressed for twelve years:

'All the old things

Were there again to see, and he was there;

So it was only right that she was there,

Being part of him. She was the part of him

That he had left behind and wandered from,

And wandering had starved. She was there

Again as from a past that never was,

And it was not miraculous or amazing.

There were twelve years between them, yet he saw

No record in her face of any change

Or stealthy work of time or of the world.' (p.965)

In the unconscious there is no idea of time in the ordinary sense. Cavender's life had been 'a long dying', 'He had been dead and damned again to living' : thus 'All his time was now eternal'. (p.939); and he declares "I am not half so much a fugitive, As one doomed to eternity in time". (p.973) Later in the narrative Cavender is puzzled at half-recognizing in Laramie characteristics strangely his own and he perceives that she is clothed in his memories:

"Was she never to be herself,
 He wondered ... Half she said
 Had more the tenor of recrimination
 Born of his long remorse and self-defeat
 Than of her native way; and half she said
 Was like her when he adored and prized her
 As an unmatched possession ...' (p.p.937-3)

What he doesn't realise the poet does. Laramie is able 'To endure him in his guilt and ignominy' (p.988) because she represents the positive part of himself that is still able to endure the burden of his heavy responsibility. This responsibility develops, during the course of the narrative, from an unformed urge to a rationally acceptable motivation. When Cavender is brought face to face with the murder-scene in the last section of the poem, he is in the final depths of degradation and hell. Thus it is consistent with his maturing self-realisation that, fighting escape by death with an obscure determination to face life, he should begin seriously to doubt Laramie's objective reality.

'There was a change

In the voice now that pierced and sickened him,

Like a sword going slowly into him.

It was not Laramie now that he was hearing,

Yet there she was, and she was Laramie ...' (p.1001)

Cavender had been buried behind his memories in unconscious darkness (see p.989) and Laramie - a link between subconscious blindness and conscious awareness - had come to show "the way before" him. Her identity with the unconscious, and her greater psychic understanding, are displayed when she says:

'And now I see

More grateful things before me, or behind me,

Than you and your doubts at work together with me

In darkness." (p.p.978-9)

Because of her unconscious appurtenances she knows more of Cavender's darkness, and because of her function as conscience she has temporarily greater powers of perception and single-mindedness.

The purpose of the projection is therapeutic : it aims to help Cavender cure his malady - neurotic fixation to the past ² by strengthening his ego so that he may live in the present and face the future. (Freud acknowledges the validity of the process when he writes, "this tendency to project ... becomes stronger where the projection into the outer world offers psychic relief.") ²² Laramie attacks the fixation when she asks

"Why go back and try so hard

To bury yourself behind your memories?" (p.989)

and declares

"You cannot hide yourself. There is for you

Only one memory left ...

There's nothing in this going back of yours

But a sick hope to find some reason there,

Stronger than you, for what you did to me". (p.989)

Laramie possesses neither divine nor supernatural power (as Cavender at first believes), merely that knowledge which he himself is potentially capable of acquiring. But the task is hazardous, and she warns him that "Knowledge is cruel". (p.994) As a psychic process in Cavender's mind she is bound by its psychic laws. She must inevitably lead Cavender back to the scene of the crime - the psychological past that must be seen for what it was - to release him from the past's 'Dead hands', and from his purely natural non-rational self. In this way the past may be comprehended and the subliminal self assimilated. Her purpose is to enable Cavender to live with his neurosis, and so triumph over it. She declared it early in the poem by telling Cavender that he could stop hiding from himself if he faced his internal and shadowy processes and looked at himself "with nature's eye".

"The worst for you

Is not to see yourself with nature's eye,

And therefore know how much you are of nature,

And how much of yourself." (p.972)

The function of the projection, therefore, is to free Cavender's ego from that part of his natural, non-rational self which, through especial internal necessities, is enforcing a conservative and neurotic point of view. It is particularly qualified to achieve this because it is the advocate of the new personality.

(iv)

Freud maintains that projection is to be understood as resulting from "the high degree of ambivalence in the emotional life".²³ It is rewarding to compare his therapeutic judgement with Robinson's, noting the conspicuous compatibility of the two. The poet's psychic histories invariably record "the struggles of antagonistic impulses."²⁴ He has, moreover, made an intensive analysis of mental dualism from the psychoanalytic point of view, Avon's Harvest for example; and from the collective point of view, which is exemplified in the habitual technique of introjection of such universal dualisms as light and darkness, heaven and hell, creation and chaos. The Man Who Died Twice illustrates the fundamental scope of the instinctual conflict, whilst "the ambivalence" which "governs most of our intimate relationships with other beings"²⁵ has been plausibly propounded in Roman Bartholow.

The poet acknowledges the central place in human nature of ambivalence quite early in Cavender's House, and so provides an indispensable perspective into the psychological structure of the poem. He emphasises the Freudian axiom that "the mind is made

26

up of contradiction and pairs of opposites" when describing Cavender as 'a thing Contrariouly composed of opposites' (p.963) - a description which was applied to Penn-Raven, for instance in respect to "the compound of his opposites". (p.850) According to Freud, projection most commonly occurs in connection with the emotive memory of a dead person formerly beloved, and is the expression of the conflict between hostility and affection. Hostility is felt "in the form of satisfaction with the demise" and "the defence against it is accomplished by displacement upon the object of hostility, namely, the dead. We call this defence process, frequent both in normal and diseased psychic life, a projection".²⁷ Cavender's projection accords with such ambivalence, especially in view of Freud's statement that "in the unconscious mode of thinking even a natural death is perceived as murder."²⁸ "Such a state of affairs can with certainty be expected if the impulses struggling for omnipotence have come into conflict with each other, for then they evidently cannot all become omnipotent."²⁹ Hence, in Cavender's case the guilt cathexis, and the defensive cathexis that aims to justify wrong actions, are struggling for omnipotence. "The morbid process in paranoia actually uses the mechanism of projection to solve such conflicts which arise in the psychic life".³⁰ Avon's Harvest is a remarkable instance of Robinson's perception of this phenomena, and Cavender is not averse to paranoid reaction against Laramie. So far as Cavender is concerned, the problem-solving mechanism of projection changes

from "a punitive and remorseful" character ("Remorse and pain May be the curse of our accomplishment" (p.p.89-90) Laramie tells Cavender) to a positive factor in the diminution of hostility during the process of re-integration. Cavender's hostility had manifested itself in the murderous onslaught, after which it was suppressed into a vacuum of unconscious self-infliction. During the lapse of time the memory of its manifestation was coloured by a rationalisation which apportioned blame ^{to} upon 'another person' who had temporarily taken command of his personality. Such a rationalisation, which is not without psychological validity, is a common homicidal tendency.

Considering what has already been said about the projective nature of ghosts, it is not surprising that the symbolic Laramie-projection possesses a metaphorical periphery of 'demons' and 'silences' that absorb projected hostility and contribute to the emotive strength of the super-ego (conscience) function. These agents emphasise his guilt and previously-open hostility by oppressing him as soon as he enters the house. The poet skillfully simulates this aspect of projection when he writes:

'All through the house

He could hear silence like a multitude

Of silences, and all apprised of him.

...

If it was demons,

They may have called him with a woman's voice,

And this might be their triumph more than hers! (p.p.962-3)

Robinson, like Freud, "exposed the demons by recognizing them as mere projections of hostile feelings which the survivor entertains toward the dead."³² These ghosts - silences and demons - which are like 'atoms moving and conspiring Against' (p.976) Cavender, 'like eyes He could not see' (p.964), are vigorous embodiments of the super-ego.

(v)

Critics have generally agreed that Cavender's House is "a study in conscience"³³ and that "the voice of Cavender's conscience "speaks "through the woman".³⁴ Centre declares: "Laramie's presence is due to the splitting up of Cavender's personality; her speech proceeds from one moiety of his divided conscience... she becomes the symbol of justice ... "³⁵ Robinson said that the poem "is instructive and highly moral".³⁶ It is, in fact, a psychological, New England treatment of the Crime and Punishment theme, and presents the thesis that there are innate, psychological laws which serve the interests of natural justice. Conscience and the super-ego are products of such law.

The precision with which the poet constructed Laramie's personality in the role of super-ego is accordingly noteworthy. In this role, she "represents the whole demands of morality"; and the "moral sense of guilt" that plagues Cavender "is the expression of the tension between the ego and the super-ego",³⁷ that is, between Cavender and Laramie. Cavender is "not one To desecrate" his "code without remorse." (p.998) He feels "damned" in view

of the morality she represents and because of her power to scrutinise his thoughts. She argues, however, that her morality, "by some celestial dispensation", contains "drops of hope." (p.995) (It is unusual if morality does not embrace the hope of redemption). When she says this, however, he is still not morally equipped to consume them, for she reminds him that "There's a distance yet Between us" (p.998). The distance is finally bridged when the penitent Cavender becomes no longer afraid of life or himself, or his obligations to Laramie and society. Then, having tamed the id that knows no values and no morality, he is on the way to attaining the fruits of morality, in grateful submission to 'the older laws and purposes.' (p.1007)

The super-ego is intimately connected, naturally, with strong guilt feelings, and Cavender's projection points to an emotional ambivalence involving a guilt cathexis. Cavender endeavoured to slough his guilt through rationalisation and evasion, but the projection prevented this and brought him back to himself and another 'onslaught' from the super-ego.

'Men were not born to meet

So much as this; and though it was their doing,

It was not they who did it. Some such balm

Assuaged him only for another onslaught

Of writhing certainly that he was held

In toils that he had woven for his long

Constriction and imprisonment alone.' (p.981)

Cavender repeated the rationalisation shortly afterwards when he said

"I was not there myself,

But one that had the name and face and body

Of me was there; and I am paying for him." (p.993)

The "I" is the passive ego. The experience of dissociation is not unusual in the case of powerful intrusions of emotion. Freud refers to Georg Groddeck in this regard : he "is never tired of pointing out that the conduct through life of what we call our ego is essentially passive, and that, as he expresses it, we are 'lived' by unknown and uncontrollable forces." ³⁸ In her reply to the first of the above rationalisations, however, Laramie adopts the common sense standpoint and chastises Cavender for not realising that there was a morality in him that would consume him; she says he should have made sure "there was no darker way" than his mere "self-blindness". (p.983)

The super-ego is an authoritative figure; its punitive face, like Laramie's, is 'fearsome and severe'. This aspect of Laramie's personality, supported by the supreme father-image and by inherent psychological law, is referred to in the following of Cavender's introspection:

'If she was there to lacerate him, she
Could only be God's agent in the matter -
And so there must be God; or if not God,
A purpose or a law.' (p.p.981-2)

Cavender's eventual comprehension of the 'purpose' and the 'law' is, essentially, an extension of his eventual understanding of the person Laramie had been. This understanding, arrived at through

a reconstruction of memory freed from repressive influences, signifies his first responsible mastery of his guilt in refusing to understand Laramie and her love.

In Cavender's House Robinson anatomizes the mental personality as disclosed by pathological states of mind. Freud tells us that "Psychotics are fissured and splintered structures".³⁹ Cavender's 'fissured' consciousness exemplifies this phenomenon. Robinson's analysis of conscience is similarly well founded. Cavender, like the psychotic, "has turned away from external reality" to the "internal psychic reality"⁴⁰ of his house; hence, his final return to external reality signifies the collapse of the semi-psychotic state. Freud explains that psychotics suffer from "delusions of observation", and from this discovery deduces the power of the super-ego. They "suffer continually ... from the observation of unknown powers or persons, and they have hallucinations in which they hear these persons announcing the results of their observations".⁴¹ Cavender's super-ego, which has the known 'form' and 'face' of Laramie projected upon it, is such a person. Freud found, theoretically, that "the separating off of an observing function from the rest of the ego" was "a normal feature of the ego's structure"; and that, as the "actual content of the delusion of observation" is "a first step towards conviction and punishment", conscience, like self-observation, is "another activity of this function".⁴² In an earlier summary of the process, he wrote:

"From an analysis of the delusion of observation we have come to the conclusion that in the ego there exists a faculty that incessantly watches, criticizes, and compares, and in this way is set against the other part of the ego. In our opinion, therefore, the patient reveals a truth which has not been appreciated as such when he complains that at every step he is spied upon and observed, that his every thought is known and examined. He has erred only in attributing this disagreeable power to something outside himself and foreign to him."

43

Cavender provides an excellent example. Apart from symbolism, the delusion of observation is the most important factor in establishing theme and characterisation at the outset. The reader, experiencing things in objective relation to Cavender's mind, is made to feel, nevertheless, the complex emotional pressure of 'observation' and hallucination:

'There was a silence that was watching him,
And there was one that listened like a spider,
Hearing his thoughts, and holding them to tell
To demons who would likely come for him
When they saw fit to come ...

a furtive, unseen breathing

Was not the breath of man.' (p.963)

Cavender is bewildered by 'silences And darkness... surrounding and attending him, like eyes He could not see' (p.964), and later

feels 'A nameless innovation ... at work' and 'atoms moving and conspiring Against him'. (p.976) His treatment and oppression are obviously identifiable with the symbolic super-ego, as the poet decisively and climactically explains in the last section of the narrative :

"What woman is that," he pondered, sick at heart,

"Who has the form and face of Laramie,

Her voice, her languors, and her levities,

Her trick of words - and half of them not hers?

Where has she been to find so many of mine

That have done service and have nourished me

Like a fantastic food, proving itself

Not to be food, but shadows? Shall our deeds,

And even our thoughts, be scrutinized hereafter

By any and all who have no more release

From follies here than to live still with ours?" (p.p.994-5)

Robinson has also alluded to other important aspects of the super-ego in his characterisation of Laramie, and one of these is its capacity to take over the parental function. Cavender's projection emphasis,⁶ naturally, the mother-parent aspect: Laramie 'was like a mother Bestowing an affectionate reproof With silence.'^(pp. 966-7)

The past also stresses the super-ego's function as opponent of free gratification of the instincts, especially the aggressive and sexual instincts. The former was aptly characterised by Penn-Raven as "aboriginal necessities", and the latter was described

by Iarame as "love" that "Prevails more in" the "blood than in" the "heart -

A subterfuge and a discrepancy

Ensured by nature not to be uncommon". (p.979)

This aspect of the super-ego provides an important theme for Robinson's poetry.

Sexual desire turns to lust in Matthias, and the experience culminates in a depraved fusion of intellectual and physical aggression. Gabrielle and Penn-Raven pay for unsanctified sexual gratification; and Bartholow experiences "instinctual defusion" when, deprived of sexual gratification through marital failure and moral stricture occasioned by ^{Gabrielle's} ~~Bartholow's~~ infidelity, he is temporarily overwhelmed by aggressive impulses and assaults Penn-Raven. Presumably Cavender also experienced this defusion in his past, the gratification and faith in love being displaced into jealousy sufficiently powerful to prompt murderous aggression. Here is a perfect example of how disastrous this defusion can be so far as the love-object is concerned, and how basic it is in pathological sickness.

For twelve years Cavender evaded the strictures of the super-ego without appeasing the moral conflict, and at the end of that time, when his guerilla-like evasions became unsupportable, he was forced to experience the war of ambivalence in a decisive and open encounter. Following the transfixion of aggression, conscience is enabled to work induratively through the weak point -

the guilt cathexis - of the ego-defence. Guilt feelings result from an unconscious need for punishment and a conscious need for expiation. Thus Laramie, in her super-ego role, punishes Cavender, fires his remorse, undermines his ego-defence : in short, she prepares him for expiation. She is mistress and all powerful -

'Holding a whip that was beyond his reach

And seeing, she could smile and ⁴⁴strike him with it

Till he should cower, and with a smarting soul

Pray for her mercy.' (p.981) -

and "may reflect", therefore, "relentless harshness".⁴⁴

Hence Cavender's original aggression is subtly displaced and turned against him: his "aggressiveness... has been internalized and taken over by the super-ego."⁴⁵ The ego, however, still retains a portion of aggression, manifested in impossible demands to, and weak intellectual assaults upon, Laramie. But it is attached mainly to the irrational self's provocation and incitement to self-annihilation.

"In this way, goaded on by the id, hemmed in by the super-ego, and rebuffed by reality, the ego struggles to cope with its economic task of reducing the forces and influences which work in it and upon it to some kind of harmony; and we may well understand how it is that we so often cannot repress the cry : 'Life is not easy' "⁴⁶

And Cavender cannot repress the feeling that 'He was in a trap' and 'Nothing was on his side'. (p.982; cp. p.976)

The irrational, unconscious self - the id in Freudian terminology -

had contributed to a large part of Cavender's blind and aggressive egocentricity. It achieved personality as an intrusion from the unconscious that attached itself to base and egocentric motives, and attained a stronghold in consciousness by instigating murder. It is the "one" who was "mad that night", "who had the name and face and body of "Cavender, and for whom Cavender says he is "paying". (p.993) He describes the id as "a devil ... unseen And unsuspected"; and so it is, for it aims to achieve victory for the chaos and darkness of its unconscious personality. The basic properties of the id - its "negative character" and "primitive" nature, its "impulsion to obtain satisfaction for the instinctual needs", its lack of "values" and "morality" - and Freud's description of it as "the obscure inaccessible part of our personality ... a chaos"; are severally referred to (by Laramie, its super-ego adversary) in a passage scintillating with psychological precepts:

"Poor Cavender!

The man who makes a chaos of himself
Should have the benefit of his independence
In his defection. He should wreck himself
Alone in his own ship, and not be drowned,
Or cast ashore to die, for scuttling others.
I have been asking, Cavender, since that night,
Where so malicious and inconsiderate
A devil could hide in you for so long time.
There may be places in us all where things

Live that would make us run if we should see them,
 If only we could run away from them!
 But, Cavender, we can't; and that's a pity,
 I'm tired of sitting here and seeing you there,
 As if you wished to die." (p.997)

But Cavender doesn't chase death; he chooses life in which death is amongst the least of little things. The super-ego defeats the id in the battle for the ego. Cavender relaxes the id's stranglehold and casts out the devil:

'if hands stronger

Than his were more involved and occupied
 Than his had been, there was no more to do
 Or say than to cast out the lie within him,
 And tell men what he was.' (p.1006)

Laramie, representative of the higher nature in man that helps to build up the ego's character, achieves her purpose and vanishes. And the poet achieves his therapeutic aim which was "to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of vision, and so to extend its organization that it can take over new portions of the id. Where id was, there shall ego be." ⁴⁷ Cavender has learned bitterly the lesson that "The limitation of aggression is the first and perhaps the hardest sacrifice which society demands from each individual, " ⁴⁸ and we "have quite unexpectedly emerged into the open from the mental underworld." ⁴⁹

(vi)

The evidence of the father-image in Roman Bartholow and of conscience in Cavender's House indicate that the "super-ego" theme is a prominent and compelling one in Robinson's poetry. Perhaps a fairly obvious comparison can be made with Shakespeare's Hamlet in this regard. The ghost of Hamlet's father is a super-ego personage; the play-scene is dramatised projection; Hamlet and Claudius feel conscience and guilt; and the father-image is contrived to conflict with certain Oedipal tendencies in the hero's mind. This conflict is an ambivalence from which Hamlet would like to escape. In his famous contemplation on suicide and the after-life, Hamlet postulates rhetorically that suicide would be justifiable if it were not for

"the dread of something after death,

The undiscover'd country from whose bourn

No traveller returns, puzzles the will,

And makes us rather bear those ills we have

Than fly to others that we know not of?

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;

And thus the native hue of resolution

Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,

And enterprises of great pitch and moment

With this regard their currents turn awry,

And lose the name of action." (Act III, Scene i, lines 78-88)

Robinson's characters seem to have taken this Protestant philosophy to heart, and in them it seems ^{to develop} ~~have distended~~ to its logical Puritan extension. This extension involves the devil of desire; a God or purpose or law; and the moral necessity of the retributive super-ego. Laramie, for instance, employs Hamlet's argument to counteract Cavender's temptation to escape from the mortal coil. Suicide is postulated as a possible, but unpromising, way out. Cavender has Hamlet's doubt concerning its efficacy.

"If memories of so galled and sorry a life

As this must follow us when we go from here,

We are all damned indeed." (p.995)

he says dispiritedly. It is uncertain, therefore, if he will find an "end" in death, and Laramie warns him that he "may choose again A sudden end, only to find no end." (p.1003) For "who are we to say when all is done?" (p.1005)

Shakespeare's play acknowledges the potency of the super-ego, and 'conscience' encases the parental function as well as qualities of consciousness, conviction and inmost thought. Hamlet's Melancholia, like Cavender's, signifies the oppressive weight of the super-ego, and his moments of manic release reveal "the ego ... in an ecstatic state of exaltation" in which "it triumphs, as though the super-ego had lost all its power or had become merged with the ego, and thus liberated, manic ego gives itself up in a really uninhibited fashion to the satisfaction of all its desires." ⁵⁰

These "desires" provoke sexual phantasies and unexpected aggression in Hamlet. His melancholy, on the other hand, testifies to the dynamics of the super-ego function:

"The melancholiac during periods of health can, like anyone else, be more or less severe towards himself; but when he has a melancholic attack, his super-ego becomes over-severe^{er}, abuses, humiliates and ill-treats his unfortunate ego, threatens it with the severest punishments, reproaches it for long forgotten actions ... and behaves as though it had spent the whole interval in amassing complaints and was only waiting for its present increase in strength to bring them forward, and to condemn the ego
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on this account."

For Hamlet, as for many of Robinson's persons, the "complaints" are generally of a serious, instead of a trivial, nature. Nevertheless, the overall fearsome aspect of the super-ego haunts Roman Bartholow, Cavender's House, The Man Who Died Twice, The Glory of the Nightingale, and King Jasper as it haunts Hamlet. Many of Robinson's characters, often tinged with melancholy, are introspective Hamlet prototypes. Cavender, for example, brooded in "a melancholy night" of twelve years duration. The conflict between instinctual disposition and ideals of duty, loyalty, and values is as strong in Merlin, Arthur, Lancelot, Jasper's son, and Timberlake as it is in Hamlet. In them "enterprises of great pitch and moment ... lose the name of action." Procrastination is a common feature

in the temperaments of such characters, and in Malory is combined with the thwarted revenge theme.

There is often evident in Robinson's themes a universality akin to that of the Shakespearian soliloquy.

(vii)

It will most probably occurred to the psychological interpreter that Laramie is a classic example of Jung's anima, "the woman in the man". If this is so, he may be expected to enquire how such an interpretation may be reconciled with her male as a super-ego figure. It should be reflected, however, that symbolic allusiveness need not exclude contradiction or irreconcilability within its ultimate homology of appositeness and consanguinity.

The symbol is the artistic means by which diverse qualities can be contained within a single image. It is like the 'dome of many-coloured glass' and is many-sided. Laramie is such a symbol; much of her strength is accordingly derived from the poet's ability to clothe her person in a raiment of multiple associations. She is a 'warm enigma' in whom are blended consciousness and the unconscious, the real and the unreal (there is 'a baffling unreality' in Cavender's house-mind), in such a way that the laws of external logic have been supplanted by the laws of internal logic. So far as these latter laws are derived from the unconscious, a certain degree of irreconcilability and apparent contradiction inevitably pertains to Laramie in her 'new mysteriousness'.

Cavender's conscious ego thus feels lost when brought into contact with her unconscious world:

"You have the privilege",
He said, with a dry tongue, "of your conceits,
And of your last obscurities. You have
A right to blind me with your mysteries,
And to see me groping, as I am now,
Among them." (p.991)

Laramie's symbolic demeanour, therefore, represents the unconscious power of the alternative; yet she remains true to human nature and to feminine psychology, especially in the terms of the anima. These aspects are revealed as "Her proper native way of indirection" (p.966) and are implicit in her statement that

"women are compounded of surprises,
And in extremity may surprise themselves
In what they know." (p.968)

She reveals to Cavender the reality of the inner essence of woman:

"Sometimes a woman
Will only smile and ask you to keep warm
When the wind blows. You do not see her face
When you are gone, or guess what's in her mind,
Or covered in her feelings, which are real
Beyond their reputation." (p.968)

The poet thus pays tribute to the anima's mystery and irrationality in paying tribute to the eternal feminine. As a super-ego figure with the functions of self-observation and conscience,

Laramie is dynamically compact. But that ^{alone} does not ~~alone~~ account for the whole of her personality. Essential aspects of the anima contribute to the rounding of the symbolic portrait.

Robinson's characterisation of Cavender appears to accord with Jung's statement that "A man's unconscious is feminine and is personified by the anima." ⁵² Outwardly and consciously Cavender had been the accomplished egoist, the voracious, pecunious, vital, powerful, dominant male (see p.p.980-982); but inwardly, unconsciously, the male was weak and the anima supported the potentially stronger, and better self. As the anima is only revealed in projected form ("the anima-image is always projected upon women" ⁵³), Robinson's technique provides the inevitable and natural means of its revelation.

Jung observes that "Femininity is ... presumably to be found in the dark". Cavender first finds Laramie in the inside dark of his house, where she informs him that "Hearts are dark places" (p.967) and, much later, that she has a plan for him which is "all rather dark." (p.994) Hence, the anima appears as an intrusion in consciousness most suited to Cavender's predicament, because of ghostly, personal and therapeutic qualities. Jung describes its intrusion as "an imitation or repetition, of the way in which primitive man comes to the conclusion that there are such things as witches and ghosts", and says that this "psychological procedure ... is an attempt to reconstruct an individual character." Cavender has an experience similar to that of "Patients" who "often suffer so

much from intrusions of the unconscious that it helps them considerably." ⁵⁴ Robinson, like Jung, interprets the anima as "a magical feminine being" when he describes Laramie's 'beauty' as

'Mobile, intangible, inscrutable,

And with a peril in it, or beneath it.' (p.969)

and refers to the inspirational fecundity of "the eternal feminine" when he writes: 'She had been wine for' Cavender 'And of a power that had usurped his wits'. (p.977)

The anima is "a life behind consciousness ... from which ... consciousness arises" ; "psychic life is for the greater part an unconscious life that embraces consciousness on all sides". ⁵⁵

Robinson acknowledges this, along with the archetypal quality of the anima, when he describes Laramie's 'pallid face' that,

'Alive with light and darkness, change and shadow,

Was one that would be fair when it was haggard'. (p.966)

The fact that the anima brings "into our ephemeral consciousness an unknown psychic life belonging to a remote past" ⁵⁶ is consistent

with Laramie's agelessness and her appearance unaffected by the 'stealthy work of time or of the world'. (p.965) She lives

"in a world where the pulse of time beats ever so slowly; where the birth and death of individuals count little, and where ten thousand years ago is yesterday." ⁵⁷ She sees the "world's easy

measurement of ruin And its inch-ruling of the infinite" (p.975),

and tells Cavender "you are still you, And Adam was your father". (p.974)

She belongs to a past "Longer ago than ageless men remember" (p.989),

and tells Cavender, who is afraid of "time", "life", and herself, that he has

"not a notion of how much time there is,

Nor even if there by any such thing as time,

Save as you make it by the sun and stars". (p.999)

Being an entity from the 'other world' of the unconscious,

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"An element of the supernatural always adheres to the anima" :

Cavender conjectures that Laramie may "have come from heaven" (p.992)

and says "she Could only be God's agent" (p.981)(this conforms with her super-ego role), while she herself suggests: "I may have come, Perhaps, by some celestial dispensation". (p.995)

Laramie displays a great variety of the emotional ambivalence,

"the a priori element in moods, reactions, impulses and whatever

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else is spontaneous in psychic life" which characterises the

anima. She expresses with rapid change such emotional states as

'sorrow', 'scorn', 'triumph', 'wistfulness', 'kindness', 'wonder',

'merriment', 'indifference', etc., and Cavender is made to feel

that 'No permanence' is 'part of her'. (p.931) The anima can

produce Eve-like images of innocence and evil, an ambivalence

especially tormenting to Cavender, and Laramie often seems to change

from one to the other. Cavender notices straight away that

'There was an evil and an innocence

That was together nameless in her eyes', (p.965)

but should have realised that, as she is part of him, 'there was no

evil in her eyes That was not first in his'. (p.970). The

'emanation of his doubt' enshrouded her 'With new mysteries'; thus,

'she was herself one moment, and another she was the devil'. (p.p.976-7)

Another important characteristic of the anima to which Jung

attaches importance, is its possession of "something like secret knowledge or hidden wisdom, in most curious contrast to its
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 irrational, elfin nature." This aspect is most evident throughout Cavender's House; it is conveyed in Laramie's incisive intelligence, and by Cavender's continual overestimation of her ability to answer 'impossible' questions. She is, of course, in the superior moral and psychological position (Robinson subtly alludes to her ability to read Cavender's thoughts - see p.995), and, knowing so much more than he' (p.981), seems to "have God's power ... compared with"his. (p.970) She "can see" through Cavender and his "memory" "as clearly as through mountain air", but says to him, questioningly : "Why look to me For wisdom that is not for man or woman?" (p.989) Nevertheless, she wears the guise of superior intuition and of fate, and verifies the assumption that "The questions of life and fate are ... often ... decided by the powers
 61
 of the unconscious."

'Laramie rose

Like fate, and stood before him like fate laughing;
 And it was in fate's voice, or in a voice
 That never in life could have been Laramie's,
 That she was speaking now ... ' (p.p.1002-3)

But "behind all the anima's cruel sporting with human fate, there lies something like a secret intention which seems to spring from
 62
 a superior knowledge of the laws of life." Possessing an intuition of the laws of light and darkness that govern human life, she came to show Cavender the hope of some light; in this way "the meaningful

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divides itself from the meaningless" and Cavender, 'alone ...
in a darker house than any light Might enter while he lived',
is made to feel that 'there was a light' :

'There where his hope had come with him so far
To find an answer, there was light enough
To make him see that he was there again
Where men should find him, and the laws of men,
Along with older laws and purposes,
Combine to smite.'

(p.1007)

Cavender's psychological achievement lies in his ability to face
reality and to experience the catharsis of immolatory justice with
rational and spiritual integrity. "Thereby a new cosmos arises".

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The "anima has a significant nature" because "there is a
cosmos in all chaos, a secret order in all disorder, unfailing law
in all contingency", as Jung expresses it; and because of 'fate',
'necessity' and 'the old law that hides in whatsoever of design there
is in time and triumph'. (p.962), as Robinson expresses it. "It
takes a man's discriminating understanding, which dissolves everything
into antinomies of judgement, to recognize this." Robinson
endeavoured to show the psychic-effects and soul-effects of such
understanding in man. He demonstrated in Cavender's House that the
peace of its reward may even be bestowed upon the homicidal outcast.
The 'prisoner' is released from 'a fire of silence'.

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"If a man comes to terms with his anima, its chaos and caprice
give him occasion to suspect a secret order, to sense a plan,
meaning, and purpose beyond its existence." Laramie helps
Cavender in this way. Out of the 'chaos' of himself' (p.997),

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"order" emerges through submission to the 'purpose'. She tells Cavender

" There is a plan

Within me that's awaiting your acquaintance

And presently will be urging your approval,

I'ts an old-fashioned plan, older than you

And all your admirable ancestors -" (p.994)

Having told him in the first section of the poem of "a faith that is a part of fate" (p.972), she inferentially encourages him to find it, and at the true moment of understanding suggests;

"there is nothing for you now

But what your laws and purposes ordain." (p.1005)

If murder is to be regarded, symbolically, as signifying self-blindness, egoism, lack of understanding, irrationalism, decayed morality and false values, the failure of an unreal love, as the poet seems to intend; then the soul plight of Cavender has a universal significance that should not be underestimated. Cavender's dilemma is, in this light, a dilemma of modern man.

The general dilemma has been interpreted by Jung in the following manner:

"... we do not actually have at our disposal any power of cool reflection, nor does any science of philosophy help us, and still less the traditional teachings of religion. We are entangled and confused in aimless experience and the power of judgement with all its categories has impotently gone to the devil. Human interpretation fails, for a turbulent life-situation

has arisen that cannot be fitted into any traditional explanations. It is a moment of collapse. We sink into a final depth, to a spiritual death - ...

It is a surrender of our own powers, not arbitrarily willed, but naturally forced upon us; it is no freely chosen subjection and humiliation bedecked in moralisms but a complete and unmistakable defeat drowned with the
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panic fear of demoralization."

Robinson faced the dilemma with something akin to, but often more positive than, optimistic desperation. He rejected materialism, abhorred bigotted moralisms, believed that religion and church had become devitalised, and declared that "our so-called civilization "
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was "going" and disintegrating.

Robinson would have agreed with Jung when this psychologist wrote: "The desymbolized world of the Protestant has produced first an unhealthy sentimentality and then a sharpening of the moral conflict logically leading, because of its unbearableness, to Nietzsche's "beyond good and evil". In the centres of civilization, this condition shows itself also in the increasing insecurity of marriage... largely because of its pathological results, this situation has led to the recent growth of the psychology
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of complexes ... "

Such concordance of outlook is evident in the lyrics, the Arthurian poems and the long poems which have been analysed in the foregoing pages. Robinson demonstrates the psychological failure of Cavender's and Gabrielle's reactions against the "insecurity of marriage" in

their attempts to go beyond good and evil. The "pathological results" are aptly demonstrated in Robinson's stories in which the achievement of such characters as Bartholow, Cavender and Matthias is to be seen in their rejection of an encumberant and "unhealthy sentimentality". Robinson's characters are, on the whole, not unmitigatingly tragic because they often accept the premise that life is a tragic phase with a not irredeemable future. Robinson, himself, often used the double double-negative to express this faith. The poet, in all seriousness and deliberation, thus eschews the modern tragedy of the modern hero as expounded in such contemporaneous works as the novels of Scott Fitzgerald and Conrad Aiken. Scott Fitzgerald is a master etcher of the sentimental mode, and Aiken, in King Coffin, is a master analyst of Nietzschean psychology. Jung, in the above passage, has indirectly outlined one of the most written-about themes in modern literature.

The materialist was often more immoral than the immoralist in Robinson's view. He envisaged for the materialist "no escape from a belief in a futility so prolonged and complicated and diabolical and preposterous as to be worse than absurd." ⁷⁰ But he considered himself "an insane optimist", and believed in a purpose and a reason that provided him with a vision of emergence from the hell of wordly realities. At any rate, he had no misconceptions about the setting in which dilemma breeds: "There is no sense in saying that this world is not a pretty difficult place", he wrote, "but that isn't pessimism." ⁷¹ And on another occasion he declared:

"The world is a hell of a place; and if life and the universe mean anything, there is no reason to suppose that it will ever be anything else. This, as I understand it, is the true optimism."

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Cavender is finally endowed with some such belief, but he has to go through hell to find it, and the greater part of Cavender's House is devoted to an exposition of the "confusion", "moment of collapse" and "subjection and humiliation" of his "defeat" and spiritual crisis. The Cavender-type of 'modern' who has forgotten "The size of life", whose "freedom of ... soul And mind and body" (985) has been undone, who has a "disordered curiosity" and develops anxiety rather than face the truth about himself; exhibits the frailty of the product of the materialistic age. Such a person is a 'lord' only 'of ruins'. He sinks "into ... a spiritual death" and murmurs "I have had death enough To care no more for dying than for sleeping." (p.990)

However, Robinson illuminates his belief that, in the very depths of this despair and living death, the germinal salvation is to be found. And even the Cavender-type is able to say to himself, as Robinson once said to himself: "There is nothing in the thought of annihilation that frightens me; for it would be, at the worst, nothing more terrible than going to sleep at the end of a long day, whether a pleasant or a painful one, or both".

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The ego has been transcended. Thus Robinson, like Jung, calculated that when all "supports and crutches are broken" it becomes possible to experience the archetype of meaning which has lain concealed in the "significant

senselessness" of "the archetype of life itself" - the anima. Laramie 'was alive' and 'fairer to see Than anything else alive' (p.965), and out of her "significant senselessness" emerges the knowledge "that we must learn Of our defects and doubts, however they hurt" (p.979). The significant senselessness and the archetype of meaning are profoundly insinuated in her final words to Cavender:

"Was ever an insect flying between two flowers
Told less than we are told of what we are?
Cavender, there may still be hidden for you
A meaning in your house why you are here" (p.1006)

It may be pertinent to remark in conclusion that, even if one agrees that Cavender's House is not a great poem, the verse is the work of a consummate and careful intellect. In view of the above analysis of Robinson's construction of psychological entities, and of their effect in inducing logical pattern in the narrative, it would seem that much critical refutation of the narrative technique is perhaps cursory and decidedly one-sided. For example, Vardis Fisher (in a review of Cavender's House entitled "Neuroses in Poetry") speaks of "The present vague of narrative poetry" characterised by "assaults upon psychoses, excursions into neuropathic darkness"; but fails to indicate how, or why, his psychologisms are relevant to an interpretation, or an appreciation, of the poem. Serious consideration of the poem seems to indicate the invalid quality of many vague, meaningless and unsubstantiated critical conceptions

of Laramie and symbolic projection. Such meaninglessness, for example, adheres to Kaplan's statements that "The ghost is the truth" ; and "The problem of her sin, his cause for doubt, essentially symbolizes the quest for the meaning of life."

(One feels that Robinson would have been peeved to learn that the meaning of life was as hypothetical as Laramie's sin). Interpretation of Robinson's longer poems has suffered too much from this kind of generality.

THE DREAM ANALOGY : Amaranth

The view that dreams are merely imaginary fulfilments of suppressed wishes has long ago been superseded. It is certainly true that there are dreams which embody suppressed wishes and fears, but what is there which the dream cannot on occasion embody? Dreams may give expression to ineluctable truths, to philosophical pronouncements, illusions, wild fantasies, memories, plans, anticipations, irrational experiences, even telepathic visions, and heaven knows what beside.

- C.G.JUNG.

If a true artist must go to the devil,
What's left of truth in him should keep the devil
Out of his art ...

- From Roman Bartholow

(1)

It is natural that an explorer of mental underworlds and a biographer of depth experience should examine the literary and poetic possibilities of the dream, especially at a time when the traditional interpretation of dreams as rare magical visions to be revered, or, more commonly, as ludicrous and uninformative mirages to be disregarded, had become superseded by a serious regard of dreams as meaningful products of the psyche. The revelatory possibilities of the dream obviously appealed to Robinson, and there are several examples of his creative use of dreams and dream materials. His depiction of personality is sometimes strengthened with accounts of dreams that indicate important motives and tensions in a character who is struggling

to grasp their unconscious significance, or relevant facets of a character's struggle for individuation. Captain Craig's dreams, for example, contribute to the psychological realism of *Captain Craig* and are an aid to the poet in his elaboration of theme. King Jasper's dream-kingdom mirrors the failure of his actual kingdom, the scope of his guilt, and the inescapable retribution demanded by his conscience. Matthias' dreams have a similarly self-informative meaning. Matthias' dream and his death fantasy serve to heighten his despair and sense of loss; to make conscious the unconscious conflict between death and Eros, past and future, irresponsible darkness and rebirth; and to clarify his struggle for individuation, faith, and unity of character. These examples of dreams in Robinson's poetry confess the importance of the subconscious mind in the delineation of character, and propound the meaningful nature of submerged experience.

Robinson employs the dream analogy realistically and symbolically in *Matthias at the Door*. Matthias' dream of Natalie is an actual, objectively reported event, whereas the mental events which conclude the poem are a phantasmal approximation of surmised experience—for here the poet writes, in a stream of subconsciousness, fashion, from within the character's mind. In this latter form world and life are temporarily *dream*, and Matthias' deepest experiences, in his search for death, his communion with the dead, and his rebirth, are revealed as symbolic processes of the psyche. This type of momentary suspension of consciousness is a feature of Robinson's psychological method, and is a good

example of the dream analogy.

Matthias' dream of Natalie, however, is sufficient to illustrate the manner in which the poet could employ the incidental dream in the long narrative. Matthias had experienced a number of undescribed dreams, in which he had glimpses of Natalie, prior to the particularly 'perfidious dream', centering around her, which is described. A dream of nightmare intensity, it led him, unconsciously, to the room that had been hers and in which he awoke from the dream. The atmosphere is competently evoked and is realised through usual characteristics of the dream-subconscious, notably, unfamiliarity, contradiction, wish-fulfilment, and fear. The dream changes from an illusio~~ny~~ scene of splendour and sexual gratification, signified as heaven, to an illusio~~ny~~ scene of despair and impotence, signified as hell. The unreality of these topographies is described, respectively, as 'regions he could name as Nowhere on earth' (p.1139), and a 'dark and foul' region of 'infernal fires'. (p.1140) Robinson's imagery is a synchro~~nism~~ of the creative and symbolic unconscious. Natalie appears fructuously adorned in 'gold'. 'There was gold everywhere'. (p.1139) Gold possibly symbolises seminal union, as well as spiritual transmutation, in a manifestation of sun or light. The dream is a transition from this illusion to an illusion of horrific baseness, and demonic union, in a manifestation of foul darkness in which bizarre and fearful aspects of dream are represented in the image of Natalie - 'a skeleton strangling him.'

' "You died, Matthias; and now you are in heaven
 With me, for ever; and I shall never change.
 My soul and body are yours, and will be yours,
 And always, which is now. There is no time
 To make us old, for there is nothing but love,
 Nothing but you and me." He felt her breath
 Warm on his face, and her warm body clinging
 To his until it seemed a part of him;
 And he was trembling for the wonder of it
 When she began, still in his arms, to shrivel
 And change, unspeakably and abominably,
 While all about him became dark and foul,
 And only darker while infernal fires
 Lighted what was once gold. Natalie's face
 Was now a demon's, and her breath was fire;
 And she was like a skeleton strangling him.
 "You are in hell, Matthias", she was saying;
 "Your God has changed his mind ..." ' (p.1140)

He awoke 'to find black air', and the dream followed him for
 a time 'like a smell of death'. The dream indicates to Matthias
 the frustration of his life, 'The foodless luxury Of a dry truth'.
 But it had a deeper purpose and meaning, and encouraged him, uncon-
 sciously, to renew the search into his inner darkness. It alludes
 to the shallowness of his conceptions of God, faith, and spiritual

values - conceptions that lead logically to an amalgamation of a false heaven and a nihilistic hell. His false heaven was an extension and perfection of purely mortal desires, conceived as a compensatory and justifiable conclusion to dignified pride, wealth and power. The poem opens with this faith on the crest of his 'eminence' :

'If years had been the children of his wishes
Matthias would have wished and been immortal,
For so he felt; ' (p.1077)

then outlines the progressive disintegration of this false eminence, and concludes with his rebirth amid humility and a vision of an imperishable faith in the ascendancy.

The exposure of his old beliefs as contraptions of egoistic convenience and vain idealisation, therefore, is the potential meaning which the dream had in it for him.

Robinson often delighted in contrasting and juxtapositioning the inner psychological world with the real external world, as he did in the Arthurian poems, King Jager, and many of the lyrics. He also had a predilection for symbolising (or 'expressionising') the external world as an expression of human desires and fears, of human fate, of human projections ; while, on occasions, he preferred to replace the external world, entirely, with impressions of inner landscapes. As he generally stressed condition rather than place, indirection rather than concretisation of detail, his psychological researches into categories of self-investigation, conscience, soul, instinct, hallucination, and dream, often provided him with

satisfactory frames of reference.

Thus, in the writing of Amaranth he preferred the dream as the best means of providing a representative illusion of the reality of failure, thwarted life, and wrong ambition. The 'wrong world' is in fact more at home in psychological landscapes (subconscious symbols drawn from memory-images of external reality) than in a realistic setting, because it is 'condition' rather than 'place'. Its people are not portrayed as people in external reality - they have the vividness and eccentricity of dream figures with metaphorical names - but are intended as symbols of real-life attitudes, states of mind, complexities, emotional peculiarities, and so on. Amaranth takes Fargo to the 'Tavern of the Vanquished' (an archetypal place psychically furnished:

' Tables and chairs

Of an unspoilable antiquity

Were dim with centuries of welcomings

And shadowed with farewells ...' (p.1318));

but emphasises, instead of the individuals he is likely to meet, the psychic qualities and events, the human aspects and types, he will see:

"You will see memories that you have felt,

And ecstasies that are not memories yet;

And you will ask of me in vain to tell you

Why the rest cannot see. Some of them will;

And some of them, caring no more to live

Without the calm of their concealed misgivings,

Will die; while others who care more for life

Without a spur than for no life at all,
Will somehow live." (p.1318)

Such is the dream-like collectivisation of experience of the 'dream kingdom', with which readers of T.S.Eliot, Franz Kafka, surrealists, and existencialists (Columbuses on the seas of revealed psychology) are familiar.

The 'wrong world' is a world of psychological conditions or states, and its people are allegories of these conditions or states. Their solidarity is dream solidarity, visualised and clarified in enduring form by the poet's imagination. And the 'wrong world', in which many people - the failures, the spiritually plighted and psychologically blighted - find themselves, is symbolised by the inferior domain of the unconscious (an allegorical Valley of the Shadow) unrelieved by the will, reason and light of consciousness. In this unconscious, however, there dwells an archetype of meaning with a voice of truth, symbolised by Robinson as Amaranth, which may save a person before it is too late, or at least offer a compensating balm of resignation and reconciliation.

Whereas Keats and Yeats attempted a formal preservation of past ruins in a motionless, timeless world of a romantic and cultural, collective unconscious, Robinson's Amaranth attempted a formal preservation of continuous ruin in the symbolic actions of the mainly personal unconscious, as a medium of immediate social and personal relevance.

Robinson's method is different in The Man Who Died Twice, on the other hand, for Fernando Nash undoubtedly lives in the world of external reality with its iniquity, poverty and social welfare

welfare halls. The dream analogy, however, is employed retrospectively to emphasise the nightmare of such a world, and to express the psychology of imagination and the artistic temperament in a world of visionary experience which has the superimposed spaciousness of dream.

The dream analogy in Amaranth provides the poem's entire structural and referential significance (apart from the juxtaposition of 'light' and external reality at the end when Fargo awakes from his dream); whereas it has an inverted and partial significance in The Man Who Died Twice.

(11)

Winters describes Amaranth as "a kind of nightmare-epic of failure", and says that "it is the culmination of Robinson's life-long fascination with the near-genius."⁷⁸ "At thirty-five" Fargo had heeded an inner voice which advised him to abandon art, because he would never be any better than a mediocre painter. He destroyed all his works, save one painting, and laboured contentedly at 'pump-building' in the 'right world'. Ten years later he had a dream in which he saw more clearly than hitherto the nature of the 'wrong world'. The poem, apart from a few lines at beginning and end, is the dream.

The action is characteristically dream action: it cheats reality, changes unexpectedly, and is often pathological, ridiculous, comical, distorted, grotesque, obscure, or irrational. Fargo is transported back to the dream's impressionistic distortion of the

world he had left ten years earlier; it is a place where people are at worst decaying, 'blind with self' and false aspirations, or are at best reconciled to habitual tenancy within its precincts. He meets Amaranth - a supernal and archetypal figure whose warning voice had previously saved him. Amaranth, realising that Fargo had not fully appreciated what he had escaped from, accompanies the perplexed visitor, on the first stage of his psychological journey, to the 'Tavern of the Vanquished', which is a kind of bohemian meeting-place that is possibly intended to satirise some aspects of the Greenwich Village cult. Here Fargo meets an assortment of failures : people who chose the wrong profession and itinerant artists whose wasted and neurotic lives exemplify the consequences of aspiration and dedication in those who have talent if not genius. He is introduced to Evensong, a composer-musician; Figg, a lawyer; Styx, a physician, Flax, a clergyman; Pink, a poet; and Atlas, a painter and ex-'stevedore'. The first four, having already perceived the truth about themselves in Amaranth's eyes, are reconciled and resigned; whereas Pink and Atlas have not as yet looked into his eye-'mirrors', and continue to live, with their unconscious doubts, in the worlds of their illusions. Atlas leaves, but Pink remains; he looks in the eyes of truth, comments on his and others' limitations, and departs to hang himself. Thus the first main episode centres around the pronouncements and actions of Pink, and is pathologically realistic so far as dream experience is concerned.

The scene changes, in conformity with dream montage, inexplicably.

'Now there were streets and houses. There was nothing

But empty streets, and houses that were still.

There was a tavern far away somewhere

Behind him, but without a guide or sign

To lead him, there was no way back to it'. (p.1328)

Doors that open and shut 'irrevocably', and a light that is

paradoxically 'not light', symbolise the progress of psychic life

in the hallucinatory experience of sleep. Common dream impressions,

such as strangeness, obscurity, unfamiliarity, and vagueness about

people, contribute to the authenticity of the scene. Fargo's sense

of being lost, alone, and afraid, of deprivation of will, and of

subservience to outside impulses and laws, expresses the vulnerability

of the dreamer's ego in the face of hostile and refractory unconscious

forces. The 'grave-diggers', obscure creatures whose functions

are by no means plain, are such metaphorical forces of primitive

and irrational darkness. Presumably expressions of suppressed

fear, they threaten the ego with extinctions

'one that with a mouth and with a mind

That was unclear foretold ambiguously

Disaster and extinction'. (p.1329)

The horrific and grotesque aspects of nightmare are reflected in

the grave-diggers', 'harsh-laughter' and coarse language,

'Their soiled and uncouth shapes, and their lewd faces

Watching him with a glee that had no mercy..'. (p.1329)

Associations of perversion and debased sexuality are not inconceivable

as references to 'picks and shovels', 'bestially ... noxious fingers',

and 'graves' of 'beds' might suggest. Aresnauth appears in larger-

than-life fashion to rescue Fargo from the 'scavengers', who then fade dramatically, as if the wrath of Amaranth had made a vapour of them.' He admonishes Fargo:

"To be lost

In the wrong world is twice to be astray,

For you are lost already." (p.1331)

Again there is a blunt change of scene which is indicated simply by direct narrative and common dream imagery:

"Now there were stairs. "Be careful", Amaranth said,

"For some of them are gone. This house is old -

So old that many tenants have as children

Ascended here in sport, and are still here

As children ... " (p.1331)

Fred's images of stair-climbing (ascension 'in sport'), 'an incessant wound', unbuilt 'bridges', and alien 'fruits and flowers' - to which he attached decided sexual significance - are transmuted into an all-embracing waste-land symbol, 'a city where there is nothing firm and nothing right.' (p.1332) Amaranth's speech is probably the most direct and explicit comment on this valley-of-the-shadow theme in the poem, and the images have meaning as indicators of soulless propagation, impotence and decay:

"There are physicians here who cannot ...

cure themselves of an incessant wound

That now no retrospect of their tuition

In a wrong school shall heal; there are divines

Who long ago lost their divinity,

And are still feeling for a solid station;

There are philosophers who delve and starve
 To say again what others have said better;
 There are wan moralists and economists
 Who write with screaming blood to save a world
 That will not read them and will not be saved;
 There are lost lawyers who have never pondered *[sic]*
 Until too late, the law that was their sentence
 To serve where they were never born to serve;
 There are deceived inventors who still grope
 For bridges that were never built for them
 Between their dreams and their discrepancies;
 There are spine-weary gardeners who are foiled
 Because their fruits and flowers are not their friends;
 And with all these there are as many others
 As there are lives that are not to be lived -
 Not here - but should have been, or many of them,
 And well enough, had they been lived elsewhere.
 Oh, this is an old house; and all the streets
 You found and wandered in, and with no guide,
 Are walled with houses that are populous
 With tenants who have never found a home." (p.p.1331-32)

Fargo's only "knowledge" as to why he is there is a characteristic
 of dream distortions: "a dimness That is not quite remembrance, yet
 remembers." (p.1332)

Dream-narrative is maintained with the words 'Now there were
 doors'. Amaranth and Fargo enter a room where Pink, surrounded by
 his curious companions, hangs from a rafter. Robinson melts the

divisions between reality and unreality with simple but effective descriptive touches, such as the followings:

'The dim wall

Behind him was more like a painted silence
Than like a wall; and the man hanging there
Was more a picture than he was a man
To his examiners.' (p.1333)

The action is imaginatively confined within the absurdity and tragi-comedy of the dream-work: Pink addresses his colleagues and asks them to leave, whereupon Figg argues the ridiculous matter of Pink's peculiar mortality.

"But how, if you are hanged,
And you are dead, and you are still alive,
And are as complimentary as ever,"
Said Lawyer Figg, aware of a new point,
"Are we to act? If you are dead, so be it;
But if you are somehow deceiving us,
And are not irrecoverably deceased,
And if we leave you hanging here alive,
We are accessories." (p.1334)

"A bad poet, it appears", says Winters, "dies slowly".⁷⁹

The scene reverts to spurious streets and houses and purposeless people. Amaranth reminds Fargo of the dangers of repressed living and denial of self-truth; "thoughts are fickle sleepers", he says, "And hours come round." (p.1337) Amaranth explains the therapeutic necessity of self-investigation and discusses the metaphysics of neurotic blindness; he says :

"There are men so disordered and wrong sighted,
 So blind with self, that freedom, when they have it,
 Is only a new road, and not a long one,
 To new imprisonment." (p.p.1337-38)

House and stair imagery introduce a change of action once more:

'Now there were stairs
 Again for them to climb. By the same light
 That was not light, and in a swifter way
 Than walking, they were in another house.
 It was an old house, older than houses are,
 Yet somehow not so near as was the first
 To always-coming ruin.' (p.1338)

This symbolism of sexual and artistic frustration introduces the next significant action, which concerns the fate of a writer named Elaine Amelia Watchman. The action and scene exemplify the unreality of the dream world and certain characteristics of the dream-work. Ambiguity and distortion are evident in Robinson's portrait of Watchman, who has 'a young face not young'. The accuracy of imaginative observation and the pun-making quality of the unconscious are indicated by the name of her 'large black cat', Ampersand, which is derived from amper and ampery. Unreality, displacement, and condensation combine to produce the composite picture of Ampersand, who possesses human intelligence, and discourses philosophically. 'Frustration' predominates in Evensong's love for Watchman, as it does in her 'wishes' for the perpetuation of her literary labors. She is infirm because she attaches absolute importance to her innocuous work, whereas he is

resigned and his 'hopes' are 'buried' ... 'In a cool sort of way that doesn't hurt.' (p.1341)

The action is grotesque and unreal. Watchman looks into Amaranth's eyes and staggers away utterly disillusioned. When Evensong attempts to comfort her by reading from her elaborately published volume, he

'found between the covers

Where leaves had been, only gray flakes of dust
That fluttered like thick snow and on the floor
Lay silent.'

(p.1347)

The author utters a 'thin scream' and turns to 'lighter dust' that Evensong gathers into 'a small envelope'. He walks away followed by Ampersand 'Crying as if bewildered and forgotten'. (p.1348)
The scene concludes with a warning by Amaranth to Fargo to beware of the grave-diggers and not to wander "far from here alone".

Section III of the poem opens with a graveyard scene ('Now there were graves') and contains two episodes; one concerning Fargo's experience with Ipswich, and another concerning the fate of Atlas. The graveyard reminds Fargo of the defeat of manhood ('tall houses were shrunken to immerable mounds'); the graves are psychotic signs of 'a mischosen warfare against self And nature.'

(p.1349) Fargo finds himself in a typical dreamer's situation: flight from past error; and he experiences typical dream actions: the delusion of flying (accompanied by relevant somatic stimuli) and the avoidance of looking 'behind him'. The following passage, therefore, is of psychological interest;

'But he must fix

His will, with no more waste of memory
 Or thought, on his one purpose of escape
 From this insidious region of illusions
 That one^c had made of him their prisoner,
 And then had let him go. He had come back
 For reasons unrevealed, and had been driven,
 Out of time's orbit into a lost chaos
 Where time and place were tossed and flung together
 Like an invisible foam of unseen waves;
 He had come back to a doom recognized
 As one to fly from, and now he was flying.
 As he rushed on he felt his heart within him
 Pounding as if with a foreboding joy
 For liberty that was not yet to be his;
 But surely somewhere far ahead of him,
 If he pursued it and saw not behind him,
 Nor thought of what there was that followed him,
 Nothing - not Amaranth even, he conceived -
 Would hold him in his frenzy for return ... ' (p.p.1349-50)

Common aspects of unconscious processes which Robinson acknowledges here are conscious ignorance of regressive fixations, and the exclusion of the unconscious from normal laws of time and space. Moreover, he employs a figurative terminology of the unconscious, examples of which are 'illusions', 'chaos', and 'unseen', akin to that of Freud and Jung.

Fargo's dream fate is not so much a matter of conscious will, and remains the prerogative of the dream. Thus, he is interrupted in his flight by a voice that clearly rises up from the 'buried' psyche; he

'heard an aged voice

Beside him, as if someone buried there

Were speaking to him'. (p.1350)

The voice belongs to one Ipswich, a foiled inventor, who is caught in his wrong-world delusion. He plans an artificial escape from it which, however, culminates in absolute submission to the irrational and the sinking of his suicidal craft in the waters of psychotic death.

Delusion and blindness are synonymous of neurosis, and Amaranth is a synonym of self-awareness whose voice encourages release from neurosis. Whereas Fargo "was one of the ... few That out of a loud chorus of delusion Sifted and heeded it" (p.1353), the inventor repudiated Amaranth's murmuring warnings. Ipswich rationalises his negative attitude to self:

"It's as well,

Sometimes, that we have reasons in the darkness

Where they like best to live. We do not know

So many forces that are moulding us

That we must have a word we call a name

For more, say, than a few of them." (p.1354)

He abandons discernment for Dionysian excess, responsibility for pathological excess, and tempts Fargo to do likewise.

Ipswich vanishes and the scene changes from the graveyard sterility of wasted minds and disordered emotions to a place of 'ships', 'wharves', and 'black water' where the inventor's crazy ship - 'the home Of sleeping demons' and delirium - is waiting to sail. The 'dark flood' of the irrational had 'once invited' Fargo, and Ipswich arrives to tempt him once more. On the primary level, the inventor seems to represent escapism through spurious sensual gratification; consequently, it may be significant that Fargo, in his onanistic flight through the graves, should meet with temptation in the form of the old man whose first words were "Come with me." Again, at the wharves, Ipswich's invitation seems to conceal dark motives, and might possibly be interpreted as a perverted parallel of the siren temptation to the Ulyssesian wanderer.

Escape is to be achieved via a diabolical drink for which Ipswich makes the usual devil's claims:

"Since I made this drink,

We are the souls of our misguided selves,

And our lives are no longer our disasters.

We are immortal now, and we are going

Where life will cease to be the long mistake

That we have made of it." (p.1356)

He offers a goblet of the 'perfidious draught', with its 'infernal fragrance' and erogenous bliss, and Fargo finds, 'with an incredulous reluctance, That he was worse than tempted ...

There was a diabolical boquet

Enveloping and intoxicating him,

As if a siren that he could not feel

Or see were breathing in his arms.' (p.1356)

But 'a power like that of a calm hand' compelled Fargo to pause, and he threw away the glass. He argues that "despair" is "safer" than "desperation" "And is not always a fixed incubus". (p.1358) Ipswich, with his materialistic "vanities" and "Plutonian amenities" had offered nihilistic disaster, coated with illusion, as an easy way out; and Fargo is made to realize that willess gratification is even more insidious than wilful repression, and that it is no easy matter to remain sane and whole in the 'wrong world'. Amaranth appears and tells Fargo that he was the power that saved him.

The next dozen pages of the narrative deal with the defeat of Atlas in his realisation that his paintings are not the masterpieces he believed them to be. The scene has changed, suddenly, in the usual manner, and Fargo is, appropriately, a mere onlooker to this drama of conflict between Atlas and Amaranth. This does not mean, however, that the dreamer's ego is not somehow involved, for it appears most probable that it has been partially displaced and distorted in the character of the fellow artist. Their predicaments are the same, but their fates are different. At any rate, this dream sequence serves as a significant warning to Fargo.

The action takes place in Atlas' studio, which (like the other rooms in the poem) is more important for its psychical qualities than for its naturalistic properties;

'On a floor

More famous than the man who never swept it,
 There was an easel with a picture on it,
 And a few sorry chairs.' (p.1361)

Atlas, drinking considerably, defends his artistic principles and abilities against the attacks of the other main characters who are intent on exposing the banality and insincerity of his modernist conceptions. Amaranth has little to say at first but eventually commands the attention of all. It is insinuated that Atlas does no more than express his insatiable neurosis, and that painting, especially mediocre work like his, is for this painter a destructive venture that, if persisted in, leads inevitably to psychosis. Amaranth says to Atlas:

"I wish, for your sake, Atlas,
 That your vociferous demon had his being
 Only in what you drink." (p.1367)

As there is no adequate bridge between his vision and his discrepancies, Atlas' demon is purely pathological. It has provoked in him sufficient fear-frenzy to look in Amaranth's eyes and to find out the truth about himself. He subsequently behaves hysterically and slashes his pictures to shreds. He is impervious to Amaranth's constructive suggestion of a new life

("Many awoke to learn that they are born
 Out of a dream. There may be a new region
 Waiting for you outside, and far from here,
 Where I shall have no power to trouble you.") (p.1369)

and is entirely possessed by his demon, whose way is death, now that "The only world that" he has "had is gone." Amaranth counsels Fargo to avoid the grave-diggers and to remember that he may lose his way (like Atlas); and this section of the poem concludes.

The last section elaborates Fargo's confusion at finding himself compelled to re-experience his past ambition, contains the episode of Atlas' burial, and ends with commentaries about the inhabitants of the 'wrong world'.

The opening sequence characterizes the dreamer's essential contradiction of feeling about place:

'Now there were glimmering walls that were to Fargo

At the same time familiar and unknown.' (p.1371)

Evensong finds it incomprehensible that Fargo, once having escaped, should have come back, because he conceives that in the right world subconscious "invaders From a deceiving past" can be "locked" out. Fargo, who is 'painting ... with a compulsion' but without 'pleasure' or 'faith', cannot answer him, although it appears that he is dimly aware that he has not fully comprehended his past and therefore has not fully subdued its lures. He tells his companion, in a characteristic dream simile, that

"It's like a dream

Of going back to school, and to old lessons

That once we thought were learned." (p.1373)

Evensong explains his ideal of psychological adjustment in which man's surest and truest feelings are in harmony with his life and what he does : Where "Your heart is ... there your treasure is."

' "It comes all to the heart, and to the treasure-
Which is adjacent, or synonymous,"

Said Evensong. ' (p.1374)

They discuss Atlas, who constitutes a warning; then Ampersand appears to see Fargo's picture of Evensong, concerning which he expresses disapproval.

Ampersand catches a fly and eats it. His discourse upon this action raises the basic psychological issue in the dream, — the conflict between the irrational mind and the higher instincts. Fargo's dream (as we have seen) confronts him with three possible ways of accepting the rule of darkness: firstly, the neurosis of wrong life resulting from a reversion to his old condition; secondly, the neurosis of living death resulting from submission to the grave diggers' instinctual hell; thirdly, the neurosis of delusion resulting from acceptance of Ipswich's escapism in the Dionysian excess of a 'wrong promise'. The first and third of these signify his confusion in the present scene, while the second figures in the following episode. Once Fargo conquers each of these attitudes (with the help of Amaranth and, to a lesser extent, of Evensong and Ampersand) the dream has served its purpose. The first is repudiated in the others' assessment of his painting, as well as in his own dissatisfaction; while Evensong contradicts his threat to "go prowling down again To these dim wharves" (p.1375), and he himself is forced to acknowledge that his "wish that Ipswich had prevailed" is futile.

The last scene is fundamentally an argument concerning what Ampersand terms "a problematical free will" (p.1377).

Fargo's ultimate survival depends upon his capacity to heed the inspiration of his higher nature. The latter in human beings is contrasted with animal nature by Amersand, who tells Fargo:

"you have certainly
An instinct that appears more flexible
And less confined and less inexorable
Than ours." (p.1378)

The dream concludes with this "instinct" victorious, and the poet inserts into the last scene actions which represent the transcendence of terror and speeches which ^{glow with} Robinson's passionate pity. Figg's elegaic speech concerning the fate of Pink and Atlas expresses sentiments that have wrung down the curtain on many a contemporary drama, and represents an attitude that has found many adherents. Figg declares :

"I have no reproach,
Or verdict, or vain censure for this man,
And none for Pink. I have not lived their lives.
I have not shared their pangs or felt their terrors
On their awakening here in the wrong world
That unassayed ambition said was right.
My only contribution at this hour
Is my suspicion that a mortal haste
Like theirs may not have hurried them on so far
As they foresaw. I do not see them here,
And cannot follow them to tell you more,
I am not mystical. But there's a jarring
Somewhere in this for me, and for the most
Of mankind, I believe ... " (p.p.1384-85)

The dream ends as Amaranth and Evensong fade from the scene. Fargo's awakening is characterised by the 'light' of realisation. Amaranth, in the role of dream censor, had given him safe conduct through regions dark with psychic peril.

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NOTES

- 1 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.210.
- 2 Cestre, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 209.
- 3 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.107,
- 4 Psychological Reflections (Jung), p.78.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Neff, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.214.
- 8 Psychological Reflections, p. 79.
- 9 "Clavering", C.P., p.333.
- 10 Ibid, p. 335.
- 11 Psychological Reflections, p. 90.
- 12 C.P., p. 95.
- 13 C.P., p.p.184-89.
- 14 "Psychologist of New England", p. 4.
- 15 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.p. 367-68.
- 16 Review of Cavender's House, The Bookman, Vol. LXIX, No. 3 (May, 1929), 322-23.
- 17 Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis tr. by Joan Riviere (London, Allen & Unwin, Rev.Ed. 1929 1st Ed.1922)), 136-37. Cp. Laramie's association of Cavender and "Heraacles Who fetched a lady from a tomb" (p.975).

- 18 Aiken, Conrad, "The Poetry of Mr. E.A. Robinson",
The Freeman, 21 Sept., 1921, 44.
- 19 Next Door to a Poet, p.p.79-80.
- 20 Jacobi, Jolande, Complex / Archetype / Symbol
in the Psychology of G.G. Jung tr. by Ralph
Manheim (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959) 48.
- 21 Cp. Amaranth, p.1316. Amaranth says to Fargos:
"I say that you will follow me
Because no other road is left for you;
For the same law that holds the stars apart
Holds you and me together."
- 22 The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, tr. and ed.
by D. R.A.Brill (New York, The Modern Library,
Random House, 1938), 878.
- 23 Ibid, p.854.
- 24 Freud, Introductory Lectures, p. 61.
- 25 Ibid, p.370.
- 26 Ibid, p.61.
- 27 The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, p.854.
- 28 Ibid, p.855.
- 29 Ibid, p.878.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid, p.854.
- 32 Ibid, p.855.
- 33 Winters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 110.
- 34 Quoted from Book Review Digest in Lippincott,
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C h a p t e r 4

THE COSMIC CHILD

Captain Craig has been described accurately enough as a long "character sketch with more or less philosophical commentaries along the way".¹ Story and narrative action are relatively unimportant. Barnard maintains that Captain Craig "neither acts nor tells a story; he simply reveals, both directly and inferentially, in ¹talking to his tolerant young friends, the hard-won faith that illuminates the seemingly sordid close, and justifies the seemingly fruitless adventures of his life."² More pertinent, however, is Amy Lowell's assessment of the Captain Craig volume. She claims: "Already, there is a surer touch and a deeper probing psychology."³

The poem is divided into three parts, each of which contains formal divisions and paragraph-like stanzas, while everything that happens is presented and reported by the poet in the guise of narrator. Part I begins with an introductory sketch of Captain Craig, described by Winters as "a learned and perverse old failure who is near death."⁴ The account of the Captain's rescue by the narrator and his friends is followed by the first scene, which includes Captain Craig's statements concerning life and society and his parable about the soldier and the starveling child. The first part ends with the narrator's private reflections and his train journey out of Tilbury Town. Part II consists of three letters from Captain Craig to the narrator and brief comments from the latter. The first letter contains the story of the

man who lived in 'hell' and the woman who lived in 'paradise'; the second is taken up mainly with a sketch of Count Pretzel; and the third contains the Captain's Christ-dream and Killigrew's poem. Part III begins with the return of the narrator, and is taken up largely with the old man's testament and second dream. The poem ends with the death and funeral of Captain Craig. This, very briefly, is the structural basis of the poem.

(1)

The opening paragraph of Captain Craig describes the main character as he was when the narrator first encountered him: an old, 'patch-clad' beggar weak from starvation. The description of Captain Craig unsuccessfully laying 'nerveless fingers on a prudent sleeve' and later retiring from the streets to 'the scant refuge of his bed' (p.113) is prosaic in its realism. His plight and, incidentally, the author's intention are revealed in a simple statement whereby the outward condition of the man is matched by his inner feeling :

'He was cold,

And old, and hungry; but the worst of it

Was a forlorn familiar consciousness

That he had failed again.' (p.p.113-14)

Robinson's intention to reveal the Captain's 'consciousness' in its various manifestations, including the philosophical, is one aspect of the character study which he intended to be about a failure - in the Robinsonian sense. Captain Craig had failed in the eyes of the world because his achievements and acquisitions were not material, his morality not bourgeois, and he was therefore

considered undeserving of social respect. But he possesses redeeming qualities which exalt him above the society that condemns him. The author's main difficulty lay, not in divining these qualities, but in preventing the man's opinions and perorations from obscuring the man.

Although the poet's success in this regard is dubious his artistic integrity is preserved. Certainly, he intended that his character ought to be fully rounded and alive from inside, not merely a mouthpiece of Emersonian formulas. Also, he endeavoured to reveal more than Captain Craig's conscious thoughts. Apart from the 'larger humor' of the situation, he was absorbed in the Captain as a psychological study; like the narrator, he observed 'the fascination of the thing'. (p.115) These elements evolve against a background of healthy humanism that pervades poet and poem, narrator and narrative.

This roundness of approach, then, is revealed in Robinson's psychological realism and humanism, while delicate nuances are contained in the narrator's observations. The narrator and his friends realise the ambiguous worth of the Captain and gradually become aware of some of his finer features, such as his intellect, wisdom, patience, and courage. Emphasis is placed on his philosophical bearing and aura-surrounding wisdom of the ages: he 'sat with an ancient ease'. He readily assumes archetypal outlines here and, indeed, in many later instances; however these pertain to his philosophical role - that of a sage who derives courage from Sun and Love, strength from idealism - rather than to his intrinsic personality.

However, Captain Craig is an incomplete genius (to borrow Winter's phrase), for it would be an exaggeration to interpret him as a modern Socrates, even though there is encouragement to do so. The Captain admits the difficulties, acknowledges that his attempt to be a detached observer does not escape personal needs and human frailty, and wistfully says:

"If I were Socrates, it would be simple."⁵ (p.138)

To idealise the man would be to deprive the Captain of his insight and the author of his limited achievement - the partly successful creation in verse form of a character drawn from real life, and comparable with a similar attempt in fiction. Thus Robinson loses little opportunity in referring to the irony and pathos of the Captain's predicament, which is the predicament of modern man, and raises the fundamental question: will knowledge and understanding come too late, if at all? For, as is the case in his realistic studies of failure, he is continually haunted by the romantic nostalgia of 'what might have been'. The pathos of Captain Craig's situation is intensified by a reference to his past and its potential brilliance. *'Es war einmal ein König'* - ironically - 'if it pleased him.'⁶

And he was right: there were no men to blame:

There was just a false note in the Tilbury tune". (p.114)

Empathy is encouraged because the situation is viewed coolly and objectively.

"There was no mystery, no tragedy."

But again, this statement proves to be another example of Robinsonian incongruity.

During the earliest meeting between the narrator and Captain Craig (the first main scene), the latter "eulogized His opportunity" to present basic arguments relevant to his outlook on life; and these, together with the narrator's description, questions, and later reflections establish firm, characteristic outlines of both persons. They are given ample opportunity to express themselves in the first person, thus establishing at the outset the introspective quality of the poem. Over-obtrusive rhetoric represents a stylistic fault but does not minimise the analytical habit of the Captain and his new-found friend. The narrator records his confusion on the evening after their first discussion:

'And with half mad minuteness [I] analysed
 The Captain's attitude and then my own,
 I felt at length as one who throws himself
 Down restless on a couch when clouds are dark,
 And shuts his eyes ... ' (p.122)

The product of intelligence, this habit enables them to reveal themselves more fully, without preventing the reader from viewing them differently or from seeing where their psychic experiences may be leading. For what Robinson reveals to the reader is an exposition of a philosophy accompanied by a revelation of successively deeper levels of psychological experience. The technique of self-revelation amounts to an exceedingly detailed documentation in adherence to psychological principles. For instance, an unconscious drama occurs throughout the poem in the relationship of Captain and narrator. The latter is the

means by which the former clarifies much of his thinking ;
 accordingly, the narrator's appreciation of Captain Craig encourages
 his emergence from confusion into the light of partial understanding.
 They are not entirely unaware of this, although the issue is
 clouded by mental, physical, and spiritual disparities. The
 Captain's quest is in the nature of advancement through a return
 to a previous state of innocence; with the road of life ever
 ahead, the narrator represents the possibility of greater know-
 ledge. The narrator becomes consciously aware of the mutual
 intimacy of the relationship when he realises

'Some prowling superfluity of child
 In me had found the child in Captain Craig
 And let the sunlight reach him.' (p.122)

This is a psychic process, partly unconscious, and leads to an
 accumulation of nervous tension. Hence the narrator feels
 freedom and relief on leaving Captain Craig and Tilbury Town,
 although he cannot define his feelings :

'I felt a comfortable sudden change
 All over and inside. Partly it seemed
 As if the strings of me had all at once
 Gone down a tone or two ...
 But free from what ...

was more than I could say ...

I was eased of some restraint, I thought ...
 And I should have to search the matter down;
 For I was young, and I was very keen'. (p.p.123-4)

His belief that he was no longer 'possessed with Captain Craig' is admission of the influence which that personality exerted, as well as his own awareness of the lingering effects of the influence. The unconscious conflict, however, is overshadowed by the attention focused upon Captain Craig and is weakened by the intermediary attitude of resignation which often pervades the minds of philosopher and narrator. The dramatic quality of the conflict is almost purely intellectual, arising from the mutual attempt of the protagonists to explore the unconscious and subterranean depths of man and nature. They have "an inward eye for the dim fact Of what this dark world is." (p.127) Thus from life dwindling to death, from a recognition of human Enigma to an approximation of Truth, the intensity of the dream is stimulated by the body's decay. Though wisdom be intangible, remote, annihilation at hand : the soul is a consenting victim.

(11)

The first main scene, then, provides an introduction to the significant ideas later expounded more fully, and succeeds logically the opening lines which introduced Captain Craig, the chief interpreter of these ideas. Although his long discursive commentary dominates this scene, it does not do so to the exclusion of the human elements in the situation. Rarely does Robinson entirely discard an opportunity to delineate character, analyse personality, or indicate, and perhaps elucidate, the obscurities of human relationships. The narrator, therefore, is differentiated from his friends, thus indicating the priority of his relationship with

the central character as well as establishing the Captain's separate identity,—his uncommon kinship with the past. He says, in terms which typify Robinsonian incongruity,

'My friends got out,

Like brokers out of Arcady.' (p.115)

And the Captain's first words addressed solely to the narrator are significant for the personal qualities they reveal. He says:

"Your friends have had enough of it; but you,

For a motive hardly vindicated yet

By prudence or by conscience, have remained;

And that is very good, for I have things

To tell you : things that are not words alone -

Which are the ghosts of things - but something firmer." (p.115)

Robinson revealed here the Captain's analytical shrewdness; his habit of precise, psychological appraisal; and his apprehension of an inner reality underlying the outward appearance of things. This last quality (as we see later) pertains to his belief in ultimate reality, and to his psychology which admits the hidden complexity of the psychic organism, and yet assumes the potential greatness of the human mind.

Another example of incidental characterisation in this scene - one which is developed more fully later in the poem - is worth noting. In introducing a parable about a soldier and a child, the Captain refers to the soldier's funeral and says:

"Sud friends went after, and they brought him home

And had a brass band at his funeral,

As you should have at mine; and after that

A few remembered him". (p.116)

The Captain's commentary then continues for eighty-five lines, followed by seven lines describing his sombre-humorous patronage, his far-away look, his beneficence and shrewd gaze; and then this question by the narrator: "But the brass band?" (p.119)?

The Captain's role as philosopher is emphasised, not without a little pathos, by identification with Socrates ('a calm Socratic patronage' (p.119)). Much is suggested, yet nothing is stated directly, for though the eyes reveal a complexity of unspoken feeling, the Captain's answer to the question seems obscure to the narrator, who describes it as a 'little inward noise, Midway between a chuckle and a laugh.' Along with a suggestion of the Captain's hidden reserve of wisdom, then, subtle acknowledgment is paid to his sense of humour and attitude towards death. In his last letter to the narrator, he humorously reminds his young friend that he is

"A candidate for mattocks and trombones

(The brass-band will be indispensable)." (p.144)

The symbolic possibilities were not exhausted here, however, for towards the end of the poem Captain Craig imagines his funeral as he desires it to be. He describes the surprise of bystanders at the "incompatible dirge" of the brass band, and the earlier question is reiterated as he imagines a bystander asking

" 'But the brass band? What has he done to be

Blown through like this with comets and trombones?' " ?
(p.159)

The symbol has become clearer, another reference has been made to Socrates, whom Captain Craig describes as a "humorist" and the identification is completed when he describes himself likewise. Again, at the end of the poem, the symbolic undertones serve their

purpose; references to Socrates, Cronos and the brass band segment the Cretan philosophy, present a vista of the old man's life and death, and synthesise his attitude to death. The narrator and friends hear his last words as he lies dying; he murmurs :

"When I am gone,

Say Socrates wrought always for the best

And for the wisest end .. Give me the cup! " (p.167)

But, under encroaching death, there was still 'some fettered

message'. Eventually

'when at last he spoke,

Before the long drove came to give him peace,

One word was all he said. "Cronos" he said'. (p.167)

And, finally, the funeral is referred to again in the last two

lines of the poem, which reverberate with the humour of the man.

This time the funeral is real, and the last impression is one

of 'subdued facetiousness'.

'And all along that road the Tillybury Band

Blared indifferently the Dead March in Saul'. (p.169)

Perhaps, after all, death can be accounted 'the wisest end'.

A supreme moment demanding fortitude, it offers release, provides

a person with the opportunity to review his life, and is a

progressive evaluation in the great cycle. Like Chaucer's Troilus,

Caplain Craig is apparently amused at the thought of tears being

shed because of such an insignificant event as his passing. There

is no reason for sorrow, quiet reverence is out of place; hence

the brass band.

We have seen that the above manner of characterisation exemplifies three particular virtues : it indicates the effectiveness of indirection, contributes to the formal harmony of the poem, and recreates the whole rather than splintered parts by achieving a cohesion of personality and attitude. Characterisation, however, is only one important stylistic attribute anticipated in the first scene.

(111)

Captain Craig's function as an intellectual medium through which past and present are harmoniously crystalised has already been alluded to, but it is in the cultural and psychological sense, rather than the historical sense, that this is true. The regression theme will be dealt with further on in relation to the martyr-complex, the philosophy of innocence, and the introspective psychology; brief mention of the 'cultural' theme will suffice at present. The first obvious and relevant observation, of course, is that Captain Craig was a classical scholar and, apparently, a student of comparative religion. He admits his indebtedness to the past, being conscious that many of his ideas are derivative. He also suggests that such references as those he makes to Ancient literature, Eastern mysticism, and Christianity collectively offer revelations of value to man. This is established in the first scene when, at the beginning, Captain Craig jests that he is "the hymn the Brahmin sings" (p.114), while the narrator describes the Captain's utterances as "Nirvana-talk" (p.116). Captain Craig quotes Sophocles (his approval of Sophoclean humanism is apparent in numerous later instances)⁷ in order to give authoritative

respect to the parable about the soldier and the starveling child; and it serves as an epigrammatic photograph of the Captain's idealistic attitude to man:

"I wonder if you find
Occasional great comfort pondering
What power a man has in him to put forth?
'Of all the marvellous things that are,
Nothing is there more marvellous than man',
Said Sophocles." (p.117)

The cultural and spiritual inheritance of modern man has its derivation in a collective unconscious of wisdom - the result of archetypal experience repeated throughout history and symbolised by the recurrent revaluations of the earth around the sun. In the Captain's words :

"There shines
The sun, Behold it, We go round and round,
And wisdom comes to us with every whirl
We count throughout the circuit." (p.116)

Sun and darkness symbolism is developed at great length as the poem progresses, and the above reference seems to introduce the mystical philosophy in preparation for later exposition. Classical references, which are to be found in abundance throughout, generally emanate from Captain Craig, although they sometimes indicate an immature striving for literary effect on the part of the author. Their purpose varies. Occasionally they enhance the characterisation, of Captain Craig or Count Pretzel, for example, indicating the plastic, profound and platitudinous

qualities of the Captain's mind, or the pathetic attempts of the mendicant Pretzel at 'cerebral athletics'. At other times, classical allusion purports to clarify philosophical speculation - for example the Fates that move and yet remain - or to enhance the spirit of comedy while contributing to its underlying idealism. An example of the latter is to be found in Captain Craig's last letter to the narrator, and comes after the account of his dream. The Eumenides, as he conceives them, may be likened to highly potent psychic forces which are to invigorate the collective mind, the unconscious cultural storehouse, of modern America; and they chant Robinson's New World Symphony run riot in a rhetorical burst of Whitmanesque enthusiasm. Here is the passage:

"Now I wall that as curious a dream
 As ever Meleager's mother had, -
 Aeneas, Alcibiades, or Jacob.
 I'll not except the scientist who dreamed
 That he was Adam and that he was Eve
 At the same time; or yet that other man
 Who dreamed that he was AEschylus, reborn
 To clutch, combine, compensate, and adjust
 The plunging and unfathomable chorus
 Wherein we catch, like a bacchanale through thunder,
 The chanting of the new Eumenides,
 Implacable, renascent, farcical,
 Triumphant, and American. He did it,
 But did it in a dream." (p.p.142-3)

A last example (also comic and ironical) of the Captain's

use of allusion is one in which he achieves a synthesis of the

three aspects of the cultural past, and occurs during a discussion

with Killigrew. The Captain declares that if Killigrew were to

write a book he would be well advised to include the following

elements for the edification of his readers:

"Christian scheme

and self-contradictory Orientalism

For the more sagacious of them; virtue-tracks

Of my Promethean bile for the rest of them;

And that will be a joke." (p.138)

The Captain's collection reminds one of many modern thinkers

who have drawn extensively upon the past for support of their

theories: indeed one may fairly justifiably describe much of

the philosophical method in Captain Craig as basically Jungian.

Archetypal experience is often forced into the conscious and

peripheral vision of the present, achieving a predication of

the essential, timeless rhythms of man and the natural world.

The power of the primordial image is sometimes exploited - for

example, when Captain Craig quotes Sophocles:

"And earth, unending, unending element of the gods

He turns, and the ploughs go back and forth,

Turning the broken mould, year after year'..."

or when he represents the strife of the recurring quest:

"We fighters over of old wars ... we shears of the Golden Fleece

(p.125)

or when he refers to the elemental or seasonal rhythm of existence:

"The world that has been old is young again". (p.125)

Captain Craig's whole philosophy of regression to the archetype,

the essence, is summed up in his desire to be himself,
 "Primevally alive". (p.126) The narrator, too, shares something
 of this sense of timeless reversal, and historical recurrence.
 On the train, he experiences a Robinsonian vision of the American
 past and 'A gleam of long-forgotten strenuous years Came back'. (p.124)

A great many of Robinson's poems bear witness to the modern
 intellectualist attempt to achieve mastery over Time, to absorb
 it psychologically, to unify past and present within the psychic
 cosmos of man. Poetically, his most convincing statement of this
 is to be found in the following passage from "Isaac and Archibald",
 in which the synthesis is realised in the dreaming ⁿmid of childhoods:

'I know I lay and looked for a long time
 Down through the orchard and across the road,
 Across the river and the sun-scorched hills
 That ceased in a blue forest, where the world
 Ceased with it. Now and then my fancy caught
 A flying glimpse of a good life beyond -
 Something of ships and sunlight, streets and singing,
 Troy falling, and the ages coming back,
 And ages coming forward : Archibald
 And Isaac were good fellows in old clothes,
 And Agamemnon was a fried ⁿof mine;
 Ulysses coming home again to shoot
 With bows and feathered arrows made another,
 And all was as it should be. I was young.' (p.178)

And, on the other hand, his most brilliant acknowledgment of
 Time's supremacy (though this is not necessarily Robinson's belief)

is attributed to Shakespeare in "Ben Jonson Entertains A Man From Stratford":

"It's all a world where bugs and emperors
Go singularly back to the same dust,
Each in his time ; and the old, ordered stars
That sang together, Ben, will sing the same
Old stave to-morrow." (p.29)

(iv)

It appears that one of Robinson's intentions in Captain Craig was to demonstrate both sides of the unresolved argument concerning reality and idealism, determinism and free will, indicating his preference for the latter. This intention is already apparent in the first scene; and, although he clearly demonstrates his own belief as to how the argument ought to be resolved, his presentation of it reveals his fidelity to reality. By examining his approach to this argument, one becomes aware of the poem's modernity and realism and the author's conceptualisation of certain psychological principles which are of a somewhat deterministic nature.

Captain Craig relates the parable of the soldier and the starving child to demonstrate the hypothesis that human beings possess power to change the course of human life for good. Against fate, misfortune, determinism - external agents - and utilitarianism and selfishness, he indicates a humanitarian creed of charity and kindness.

The environment into which the child was born is a condition of determinism ; he was

"A ragged -vested little incubus,
 Born to be cuffed and frightened out of all
 Capacity for childhood's happiness -
 Who started out one day, quite suddenly,
 To drown himself." (p.117)

But the soldier "came along" and

"looked at him
 With such an unexpected friendliness,
 And talked with him in such a common way,
 That life grew marvellously different ...
 And water that had called him once to death
 Now seemed a flowing glory." (p.117)

Moreover, an earlier statement of Captain Craig's is partly a refutation of determinism, suggesting that it doesn't involve the admission of anything very significant.

"We may say
 The child is born, the boy becomes a man,
 The man does this and that, and the man goes, -
 But having said it we have not said much,
 Not very much." (p.116)

The case, however, is not as simple as this would indicate: 'hell is more than half of paradise'. Thus, there is the ambiguous and ironical reference to social responsibility, at the beginning of the poem. The narrator, indicating the Captain's plight, says deterministically that

'there were no men to blame:

There was just a false note in the Tilbury tune' (p.114)

Six lines later, however, the implication is that men were to blame, for

'They found it more melodious to shout

Right on, with unmolested adoration,

To keep the tune as it had always been,

To trust in God, and let the Captain starve.' (p.114)

The narrator and his friends, at least, were not paralysed by Tilbury complacency.

Robinson, of course, could not be expected to be firmly decided on the powers of human intervention in the affairs of others:⁹ he presents cases where human beings are either powerless or capable of changing human situations, or of freeing themselves of neurotic obsessions. That he refused to be dogmatic complements the truth of his presentation of human nature and of his awareness of the vast range of situations and personal relationships. Captain Craig illustrates the emphasis Robinson placed on the therapeutic importance of a person offering understanding and sympathy.

Captain Craig contends that it is all the Child in man - the spirit of fundamental innocence receptive of sunshine and laughter - that redeems him. And he continues by saying that men are

"brutes without him, - brutes to tear the scars

Of one another's wounds and weep in them." (p.125)

The brute in man "loves us not" and is the agent of "anguish and

flesh-wretchedness". It resides in an inner dungeon and is the master of the primitive instincts, these crude instruments of sensual gratification which, if not satisfied, resort to destruction. Robinson's concept of the brute is, after all, similar to the Freudian concept of the Id. The brute, like the Id, inhabits the dark world of the unconscious; hence darkness in the poem is a complex symbol, not only of death, spiritual blindness, destitution, despair, social evil etc. but also of the Unconscious. Robinson implies that the more a person succumbs to blind impulse, illusion, prejudice, and other manifestations of irrationality (that is, the deeper he is embedded in his own personal darkness), the less there is of the child within him and, correspondingly, the further he is removed from the Light and the Sun. This is fairly orthodox psychology (as we recognise now), and is deterministic according to the degree of power attributed to the unconscious mind. Hence it is possible to follow the psychological implications which are subtly propounded, especially in the last part of the poem.

Towards the end, Captain Craig declares that the "clouded millions" who dwell in darkness are not

"quite as foreign or far down

As you may think to see them. What you take

To be the crudest mean thing that crawls

On earth is nearer to you than you know." (p.158)

Robinson frequently uses reptilian imagery to stress the primitive side of life and to symbolise unconscious forces, while such

imagery is serviceable because of its high degree of associative reaction - primeval fear, subterranean darkness, labyrinthine horror etc. The above example of "the crudest mean thing that crawls" is explicit enough, but the crocodile symbol in the ^{most} Captain's dream, the "singular" he had ever experienced, is much more connotative. The Captain repeats a psychological truism in the above context when he declares that the "mean thing" belongs oppressively to human nature, and that it must be recognised and assimilated preparatory to its effective displacement. For he advised that

"You cannot hide yourselves

In any multitude or solitude,

Or mask yourselves ..."

without being "found out". (p.158-59). It is necessary, therefore for one to comprehend the nature of one's inner being, to possess "an inward eye for the dim fact Of what this dark world is" (p.127), before the brute is supplanted by the child and peaceful self-possession achieved.

Previously, in Part II, Captain Craig explained the importance of this in his discussion of the parable of the antithetical couple. After relating their story, he declares that they represented "The child in absence" or at least "In ominous defect." (p.13)) The man and the woman both failed originally, because they had not

"set themselves

To analyze themselves and not each other." (p.130)

Captain Craig demonstrates that it is imperative to understand the "shadows" before being able to "read the sun", but emphasizes that there is a "devil" in the sun as well as in the shadows. The mind's semi-conscious and unconscious worlds, containing as they do the power to perpetuate either bliss or woe, possess their devils, or brutes, who invite the rule of ignorance in a meaningless dance of life and death. The first steps in subduing these devils is to recognise them, to oust prejudice, and to make "magnanimous advance Through self-acquaintance." (p.130) The Captain describes the 'diagnosis' whereby the devil may be revealed in an interesting passage that indicates his introspective psychology. And it would not be unreasonable to postulate that, as a philosopher, he is not outside the Schopenhauer-Nietzsche tradition which points forward to the clinical formulations of psychoanalysis. Allowing for its rhetorical metaphors and metaphysical corollaries, then, the following passage is quite remarkable:

"To most of us, you say, and you say well,
 This demon of the sunlight is a stranger;
 But if you break the sunlight of yourself,
 Project it, and observe the quaint shades of it,
 I have a shrewd suspicion you may find
 That even as a name lives unrevealed
 In ink that waits an agent, so it is
 The devil - or this devil - hides himself
 To all the diagnoses we have made
 Save one. The quest of him is hard enough -

As hard as truth; but once we seem to know
 That his compound obsequiousness prevails
 Unferreted within us, we may find
 That sympathy ...

[will be the means by which]

A man may read ...
 Proportionate attest of ignorance,
 Hypocrisy, good-heartedness, conceit,
 Indifference, - by which a man may learn
 That even courage may not make him glad
 For laughter when that laughter is itself
 The tribute of recriminating groans." (pp.131-2)

This passage is proof of the psychological basis of Captain Cfaig's philosophy and of Robinson's appreciation of the Unconscious and its mechanisms. The Captain employs the rationalistic argument that the first step towards spiritual well-being is psychological well-being. Once the latter is established, the instruments of the higher life are at one's disposal ; they are; wisdom, courage, knowledge, generosity, candor, and faith in reason. The child "is the saviour of the ages". (p.132)

The Captain regards "the soul of reason" as the "great achiever", and the importance he attaches to it is comparable to the importance attached to it by a contemporary such as Thomas Mann. This is most evident in the latter's appreciation of Freud. He claimed that Freud's importance was largely a consequence of his contribution towards the advancement of humanity. Far from promulgating a doctrine of pessimistic resignation, Mann claimed,

Freud contributed to the enthronement of 'the soul of reason' by approaching the irrational rationally, and by making possible greater rational control in the affairs of life. Though restricted to a far narrower concept of reality, this approach is advocated by the mystical Craig, whose spiritual psychotherapy creates

"The first revealing flash that wakened us
When wisdom like a shaft of dungeon-light
Came searching down to find us." (p.132)

(v)

In Captain Craig the dark powers of the mind are allied with the shadowy metamorphosis of death. Three kinds of darkness, or unconsciousness, may be distinguished: the darknesses of the soul, of death, of the living death. Needless to say, then, there are occasional cosmic parallels with the human situation evident in the central philosophy of the poem; and the groping mind of man may be interpreted as a microcosmic representation of an eternal struggle. On the other hand, each of the three conditions are observed in accordance with the principle of reality; and much of the realism in the poem relates to the characterisation and analysis of mental phenomena, the rhythmic undertones of death, and the Zola-like descriptions of the hell on earth.

The characterisation of Von Pretzel the Obscene is an example of the first condition. Captain Craig describes him as a

"friendless, fat, fantastic nondescript

Who knew the ways of laughter on low roads, -

A vagabond, a drunkard, and a sponge,

But always a free creature with a soul." (pp.134-5)

The man is inherently contradictory and therefore complex.

The above description, and others, suggest the ironic implications of this, as well as the psychic depths of the man and the degeneracy and primitiveness of these depths. A sceptic, he had some talent for poetry, criticism, and music; but his talents were incomplete and his personality distorted by a neuroticism that contributed to this incompleteness. There are associative suggestions of Pretzel's maladjustment, as in the evocation of the line

"He made a reeking fetish of all faith" (p.136)

He was capable, however, of sincerity and dedication, and even insight, as in the following statement interpolated by realistic descriptions:

"The more we measure what is ours to use,"

He said then, wiping his froth-plastered mouth

With the inside of his hand, "the less we groan

For what the gods refuse." (p.136)

Von Pretzel regards himself as a kind of martyr who has sacrificed 'wisdom' and 'personality' for the 'preservation' of others. He excuses his 'begging' on the grounds of his 'giving'. He sublimates his hideous psychological abnormalities in the belief that he is a genius. Although he admits that he may be a victim of 'circumstance' he doesn't realize how much this is due to

psychological determinism. (And he is also a victim of the author's irony).

" 'Though I be not the one thing or the other ...
Though I be cliff-rubbed wreckage on the shoals
Of Circumstance, - doubt not that I comprise,
Far more than my appearance.' " (p.137)

The second condition of unconsciousness is that imposed by death, for there are indications in Captain Craig of a tendency implicit in many of Robinson's poems: namely, preoccupation with death.¹⁰ Firstly, it is manifested as an awareness of the physical effects of approaching death. When Captain Craig is confined to bed, it is obvious from the narrator's observations - the 'sick, soft closing of his hand' the 'cadaverous' face; the eyes in which the 'spark .. was dry' (p.148) - that death is near. A second manifestation is psychological and is produced by the idea of death. As the Captain's health deteriorates the divisions between conscious and unconscious become less pertinent; hence the Captain's dreams become more vivid and 'significant' under the stimulus of bodily decay. Referring to a dream that reflects his inner metabolism, he recalls that he was "tortured out of death" and says

"Faint waves of cold, as if the dead were breathing,
Came over me and through me." (p.141)

Immersed more deeply and frequently in his personal darkness, however, he feels the warmth of the sun's light near; and he is inspired to the most fundamental expression of his philosophy.

Death is a condition of hell when it is living death, and

as such the author sometimes describes it. Captain Craig confessed to having experienced this kind of unconsciousness. "I have lived, And I have died, and I have lived again", he said.¹¹ But it is not a psychological condition peculiar to the individual: suffering draws together the separate cords and unites them like strings in a net. That net is a kind of group mind and it is woven by Destiny. Although this condition may culminate in existential hopelessness, it is a social reality. Captain Craig, quite early in the poem, is the mouthpiece of one of the poet's most naturalistic appraisals of life:

"I have cursed

The sunlight and the breezes and the leaves
To think of men on stretchers or on beds,
Or on foul floors, things without shapes or names,
Made human with paralysis and rags;
Or some poor devil on a battle-field,
Left undiscovered and without the strength
To drag a maggot from his clotted mouth;
Or women working where a man would fall -
Flat-breasted miracles of cheerfulness
Made neuter by the work that no man counts
Until it waits undone ; children thrown out
To feed their veins and souls on offal...Yes
I have had half a mind to blow my brains out
Sometimes; and I have gone from door to door,
Ragged myself, trying to do something -

Crazy, I hope - But what has this to do
 With Spring? Because one half of human kind
 Lives here in hell, shall not the other half
 Do any more than just for conscience' sake
 Be miserable? Is this the way for us
 To lead these creatures up to find the light, -
 Or to be drawn down surely to the dark
 Again? " (pp.126-7)

Farewell romance! This passage not only bears witness to the poem's modernity of content in 1902, but also suggests comparison with the naturalistic novel - a comparison that indicates its weakness as poetry. The above lines lack the precision, technical ingenuity, emotive appeal and metaphorical range of Owen's war poetry, for example, or Eliot's poems of 'death's dream kingdom'.

(vi)

Edwin Arlington Robinson's poems often demonstrate the thesis that human beings are their own enemies, being victims of temperament, environment, heredity, etc. Thus, human behaviour is pre-determined in many ways by psychological conditions, not least among which are those initiated by the all-powerful unconscious mind. Alternatively, he demonstrated the contrary thesis that human beings are capable of overcoming their shortcomings and inhibitions by extreme exertion of will power, and by consciously controlling their passions, fears, and more primitive instincts. The theme that character is fate, then, is suggested

by these two extremes. Robinson's presentations of the theme often implies that he believed the truth might be found somewhere between these extremes. We have seen in the previous pages that the poet demonstrated aspects of this theme, and that Captain Craig's philosophy of mature self-realisation was based on a recognition of the powerful influence exerted by the "devil" of the unconscious. Captain Craig's second parable illustrated the subtle reign of such a psychic force and the consequent mental and spiritual deformity of surrender to nihilism or blind optimism ; these reactions, he emphasised, were only two in thousands.

"There are fifteen thousand ways to be one-sided,

And I have indicated two of them." (p.133)

Such is the diversity of human nature! While the arguments of Captain Craig may be said to expose and transcend the limits of psychological determinism, the characterisation of the man indicates that he was not 'free' psychologically or spiritually : the child redeemed the man indeed, but the man was not the child. Robinson earnestly endeavoured to prevent his characterisations from failing the test of authenticity; nevertheless, Captain Craig is not a mature work, partly because it is inflated into mannerism and deflected into rambling, flat prose by author and character alike. Basically, however, Captain Craig is authentic. And he is credible in the way that many of Robinson's characters are credible: although they may be highly conscious and self-analytical, they are never entirely aware of themselves. Accordingly, the author indicates, often most skilfully, the

unconscious motivations of behaviour so that a character takes on dramatic perspective, and author and reader are rewarded with the simultaneous advantage of introjection and objectivity.

Consider the characterisation of Captain Craig. A philosophical demeanour is attributed to him early in the poem and becomes progressively prominent. The portrayal, however, goes deeper than this simple level, for the author sought to present less obvious, but more dynamic, facets of the man's personality, facets which also affected his thinking. Robinson delineates unconscious aspects of the personality, delicately refining the portrait by showing that Captain Craig was vaguely familiar with them, and studies the Captain's reactions to them in the light of partial revelation. This is relevant because he is an extremely self-analytical character, while his philosophy includes import^{ant} psychological premises. The process of self-enlightenment in the poet's best character studies is like a delicate arrangement of mirrors and inter-reflections which enable the person, in Craighian terms, "to break the sunlight of" himself, "Project it, and observe the quaint shades of it." (p.131)

One unconscious facet of Captain Craig may be described in terms of a martyr, or Christ, complex. He occasionally regards himself as a martyr, not blatantly and egotistically like Pretzel, but idealistically. This is often revealed in semi-conscious attitudes. There is, for instance, the identification with Socrates already alluded to. Captain Craig may regard his death as a joke, but there is an underlying sense of martyrdom

about it as he metaphorically takes the poison, exclaiming "give me the cup". (p.167)¹² Consider, also the haunting sense of martyrdom enveloping his mysterious decline from prestige to abasement, a fall which suggests that he refused to 'sell his soul' or conform to a shallow, mediocre pattern of life. More particularly there is the implicit, unconscious acknowledgement that his dedication to truth and the light, complemented by personal shortcomings, precipitated his 'failure'. In a sense his insight that there is only "One way that shall be taken, climb or fall" (p.152) was his undoing. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Captain Craig is a martyr in the typical Robinsonian sense that man's pilgrimage inevitably leads him through the hell of a martyrdom imposed by his destiny. The fates figure prominently in the experiences of this self-styled "abhorred iconoclast."

Humility, modesty, and lack of accomplishment sometimes intercede, in the Captain's mind, to disguise his identification with the type of person who is a martyr to suffering in the interest of truth. Thus Captain Craig argues that although he shaped "no songs", "made no music", "Thrilled no canvas", he had "a few good glimpses ... Of heaven through the little holes in hell" (p.133); and accordingly could

"half understand what price it is

The poet pays,¹³ at one time and another,

For those indemnifying interludes

That are to be the kernel in what lives

To shrine him when the new-born men come singing. (pp.133-4)

A self-castigating sense of egotism, however, seemed at times to make his attitude more self-conscious and perceptible. Early in the poem Captain Craig describes himself as "an outcast usher of the soul" (p.115), while he later recommends himself to the narrator as

"One of Appolo's pensioners (and yours),

An usher in the Palace of the Sun." (p.144)

It was this kind of consciousness which Killigrew interpreted as sublimatory and egocentric when he declared that the Captain's "Ego ... seems to be about the same as God." (p.139) Captain Craig attempted to rationalise and justify his martyrdom.

It is not surprising, therefore, that he has a marked tendency to see himself as a Christ figure. He may through disenchantment humanise Christ, he may declaim upon the fruits of Christianity (thus elevating himself subconsciously by comparison), but this only tends to consolidate the secret identification. He thinks sometimes

"The man of Galilee (or, if you choose,

The men who made the sayings of the man)

Like Buddha, and the others who have seen,

Was to man's loss the Poet - though it be

The Poet only of his reverse,

The Poet we remember." (p.147)¹⁴

Captain Craig regarded his own defeat poetically as a means of providing spiritual rewards, and believed the psychic energy expended in 'climbing' had not been wasted. He was enabled, therefore, to share with Christ some "fragment of God's humor"

and, in moments of vision, learned to "laugh with God."

Like Christ, Captain Craig employed the parable method to make his meaning plain. There are certain psychological and ethical parallels, though these are not without eventual divergence. As we have seen, Captain Craig recommends the Christian doctrine Know Thyself, and declares that the Wisdom of Heaven is a subjective, as well as an objective, reality:

"know

As well as you know dawn from lantern-light,
That far above you, for you, and within you,
There burns and shines and lives, unwavering
And always yours, the truth." (p.151)

In Captain Craig's first declaration to the narrator, Robinson draws attention to the identification, for the Captain emphasises sacrifice and Christian charity:

"First, would I have you know, for every gift
Or sacrifice, there are - or there may be -
Two kinds of gratitude : the sudden kind
We feel for what we take, the larger kind
We feel for what we give." (p.115)

He then goes on to extol humanitarian kindness in the first parable. In his correspondence to the narrator, he diagnoses at great length upon his philosophy of the child, and this inescapably resembles the Christian doctrine of innocence whereby the spirit of Christ is likened unto a child. The following lines, in which the Christ allusion is obvious, makes this clear:

"The child ... is the saviour of all ages,

The prophet and the poet, the crown-bearer." (p.132)

Natural innocence, he claims, leads the way toward the greater love of God.

It may be contended that these above examples reveal merely an acceptance of certain Christian teachings, and that there is no need to pursue the matter further nor argue in terms of 'identification'. Robinson invalidates this line of reasoning, however, in the second part of the poem where he indicates the unconscious origin of the 'complex'. Captain Craig relates a dream which reveals not only his unconscious striving to identify himself with Christ, but also the gulf between ego and ego-ideal : an admission that serves irony, humility, and re-integration. The first identification is achieved through suffering. The dreamer lay down against a tree but, unable to sleep, was "tortured out of death". It is quite possible that the tree subconsciously represents the Cross to the dreamer,¹⁵ while his statement that

"There was neither sun

Nor moon, nor do I think any stars;

Yet there was light," (p.141)

may refer to that particular astronomical phenomenon which occurred during the Crucifixion. In this case the 'light' would be divine, rather than corporeal. Captain Craig, as the anguished dreamer, was confronted by "the Man, The Mystery, the child" (p.142)¹⁶ who asked him why he was there. The dreamer replied : "I was a carpenter ... But there was nothing in the

world to do." (p.142) The dream concludes with the Child-figure's exhortation and the dreamer's uncertainty :

" 'And then go learn your trade in Nazareth.

Only be sure that you find Nazareth' -

'But if I starve - what then? ' said I.- He smiled".
(p.142)

The irony and ambiguity of these lines is almost Kafkaesque.

Captin Craig's unconscious identification also conforms to the pattern of the 'death wish', for it provides the justification that true glory can only be achieved through death; and congenital with this is a desire to return to an early, womb-like state of innocence and sleep. This corollary can be interpreted as a psychological aspect of his philosophy of the child. At the beginning of Part II he confesses his 'desire to return' archetypally:

"I cannot think of anything to-day
That I would rather do than be myself,
Primevally alive, and have the sun
Shine into me." (pp.125-6)

The warm spring days are symbolic of the life before memory; he says "I have yearned in many another season for these days". (p.126). However, in a moment of self-realisation before death, he understands that the yearning may be for "final and irrefragable sleep"; and admits that

"it is easy too to be deceived
And alienated by the fleshless note
Of half-world yearning." (p.152)

The shadow falls between the idea and the reality : one must

proceed along a path of darkness towards the gates of self-realisation. Early in the poem the narrator dubbed Captain Craig's philosophy as "Nirvana-talk", implying transcendental forgetfulness, and this state of becoming lost in the One has its psychological parallel. In the dream referred to in the above paragraph, the Freudian implication is quite clear when the dreamer said he

"lay at rest,

Or should have seemed at rest, within a trough

Between two giant roots." (p.141)

His desire to return to the womb condition can only be realised through death, but his wish for its sleep was combatted by fear; he was afraid of suicide, even though the dead were breathing over him:

"A weariness

Was on me, and I should have gone to sleep,

But I had not the courage. If I slept,

I feared that I should never wake again;

And if I did not sleep I should go mad,

And with my own dull tools, hack out my life.

And while I lay there, tortured out of death,

Faint waves of cold, as if the dead were breathing,

Came over me and through me." (p.141)

The life-force and the desire for immortality were not extinct, however, and as the dream continued he proceeded to sublimate the death instinct in terms of spiritual salvation; and in turn death must exact its earnings.

It has already been observed that impending death brought Captain Craig into more flexible and complete contact with the inner world. It only remains now to mention the increasing power death was wielding unconsciously, as well as physically, and to refer to the second dream, to realise how completely it was guiding him on a journey through territories of the Unconscious.

Near death Captain Craig becomes increasingly remote and desires 'to go to sleep'. He assumes characteristics of dream; his cautiousness, for instance, is the quality of one who is 'cautious in a dream'. His time tends to become dream-time, his hours 'dream-hours'. Even the narrator's observation of a trivial mannerism, such as the raising of a dish of broth 'So fervently and so unconsciously' (p.160), emphasises his drift towards unconsciousness. It is at this stage, when even his frown has something in it his friends had never seen before, that he relates his dream of the previous evening.

At the beginning of the dream he met Hamlet, who was engaged upon a 'ridiculous' task, in a rather Laforguan setting - and there is an allusion to death and futility -

"I found Hamlet -

... at work, drenched with an angry sweat,

Predestined, he declared with emphasis,

To root out a large weed on Lethe wharf." (p.161)

He laughed at Hamlet, who eventually laughed with him.

Afterwards they were transported on the back of a crocodile:

"away we went to an undiscovered country -¹⁷

A fertile place." (p.161)

(The journey towards death is also an excursion into uncharted regions of the mind, a place of 'flag-fens'.) They came to a region similar to the first, and Hamlet at once "began to tug" a weed. However, "a dreadful hunger seized him" and they killed the crocodile and ate it. Hamlet resumed his task until the weed "snapped off" just above the root"; immediately the dreamer "was left alone". (p.162) The dream ends with the dreamer conscious that "The bubble rose" (thus simulating his rise from the depths of sleep). He woke up still laughing at Hamlet. The dream illustrates by geographical analogy the layers of the pre-conscious and unconscious, implying a sense of depth. It could perhaps be suggested that the crocodile symbolised primitive, untamed, and regressive impulses and that the eating of it represents a hidden craving to capitulate to these impulses. At least one can claim that Robinson is aware of the unconscious as a dynamic factor in mental experience, and that he stresses its primitive characteristics; moreover, he observes the distinction between the manifest content and the latent content of the dream.

It may be concluded quite justifiably, then, that Captain Craig is psychologically less aware of himself than he is philosophically aware of his ideas. The psychological import of his introspective philosophy of mind is fairly apparent in the delineation of his last 'testament'. Idealistically, this declaration resists all arguments of a deterministic,

negativistic, or pessimistic nature. He claims that it is "determining Play-service" to see only "The world's one-sidedness" (p.154), and he theoretically resists the impulse towards death when it is merely lethargic escapism. Nevertheless, the psychological insights often provide assurance of Robinsonian profundity. There are, for instance, the two following passages of the symbolic integration of mind, sea, and death, which are noteworthy for poetic quality as well as psychological voracity:-

(1) Captain Craig is speaking :

"There are few
Still seas that have no life to profit them,
And even in such currents of the mind
As have no tide-rush in them, but are drowned,
Crude thoughts may dart in armour and upspring
With waking scound, when all is dim with peace,
Like sturgeons in the twilight out of Lethe;
And though they be discordant, hard, grotesque,
And all unwelcome to the lethargy
That you think means repose, you know as well,
As if your names were shouted when they leap,
And when they leap you listen.- Ah! friends, friends,
There are these things we do not like to know:
They trouble us, they make us hesitate,
They touch us and we try to put them off.
We banish one another and then say
That we are left alone : the midnight leaf

That rattles where it hangs above the snow -
 Gaunt, fluttering, forlorn - scarcely may seem
 So cold in all its palsied loneliness
 As we, we frozen brothers, who have yet
 Profoundly and severely to find out
 That there is more of unpermitted love

In most men's reticence than most men think." (pp.154-5)

(2) The narrator describes Captain Craig on the brink of death:

'It seemed as one
 Marooned on treacherous tide-feeding sand
 Were darkly calling over the still straits
 Between him and irrevocable shores
 Where now there was no lamp to fade for him,
 No call to give him answer. We were there
 Before him, but his eyes were not much turned
 On us; nor was it very much to us
 That he began to speak the broken words,

The scattered words, that he had left in him.' (pp.164-5)

Examples of psychological realism are scattered throughout these concluding pages. Captain Craig summed up the human premise of his philosophy as the science of "looking soulward through a man". (p.154) His description of mental states varies from "warmed with old illusions and regrets" (p.152) to that of experiencing "the strings of thought ... pull tight." (p.156) He describes the spiritual "journey" as the "forward way", and psychological regression as "servitude ... on some backward level of lost laws And undivided relations." (pp.156-7) Moreover,

his acknowledgement of the beast in man, as well as the undisciplined and primitive world the beast roams in, enables him to express a balanced attitude to life. "The truth" he said "Was never found alone through flesh contempt Or through flesh reverence." (p.153) A further example of adroit psychological method is evident when the Captain analyses human love:

"Still do I find, when I look sharply down,
There's yet another flower that grows well
And has the most unconscionable roots
Of any weed on earth. Perennial
It grows, and has the name of Selfishness;
No doubt you call it Love." (p.153)

He concludes that Eros has roots deep in human nature, and that it is inherently selfish because it is a fundamental craving with the ultimate goal of self-gratification. But it is his faith in the sun and the Orient of eternal existence, in the power of man to attain self-realisation, that finally transcends the hereditary, environmental, psychological and pre-destined lot of mortal man.

(vii)

It has already been claimed decisively enough that Captain Craig is not a negligible poem when one considers its achievements, although it fails to satisfy the demands of art. The poetry is not great, the form is inadequate, and the style not always appropriate ; moreover, the imagery is often

unsuitable and lacking in vitality. The comedy has human depth and, admittedly, the irony is often superb; but the artifice, the striving for humour, can irritate as in the opening lines of the Captain's testament:

"I, Captain Craig, abhorred iconoclast,
Sage-errant, favored of the Mysteries,
And self-reputed humorist at large," etc. (p.149)

The idealism, too, is sometimes unconvincing and platitudinous, just as Pretzel's nonsense-talk is merely artistically degenerate; that Pretzel was a bad poet is no excuse for bad poetry on the part of Robinson, not even in the guise of realism.

Serious formal and stylistic weaknesses result from the poet's taking too long to say what he has to say, while he permits too many unnecessary digressions, an example of which is Killigrew's poem together with the interceding commentary. There is too much philosophy, too much unrelieved exposition. The crude device whereby Robinson enables Captain Craig to read aloud his testament takes ten pages, after which he hasn't even exhausted all he has to say. Nor can one excuse the lack of dramatic intensity and unity, or the structural weakness of Part II in which Robinson begs the reader accept the Captain's fantastic correspondence (in blank verse !) as believable.

On the other hand, however, the structure does possess a certain solidity and strength which prevents its collapse. Consider, for instance, the high degree of imagistic and ideational interrelation, the cross-fertilisation of associations, the introspective and reflective reactions, the subtle development

of ideas, all of which have enriched the poem in ways that the present chapter has endeavoured to indicate.

Captain Craig, then, soporiferous with interminable conversation as it undoubtedly is, deserves recognition for its especial merits, chief among which are its modernity and frank experimentation - qualities outlined in the first chapter and thenceforth salvaged (it is hoped) from hands too anxious and too deprecatory. Many aspects of the characterisation suggest, on behalf of the author, the promise of maturity - in particular, of the rendering of situation and the creation of human people in the long poem. The Jamesian evocation of personality through refinement, delicacy, and subtle analysis, although not always successful, encourages sensitive appreciation of a character's thoughts and feelings; and it was temperamentally compatible with the intellectualist Robinson. Consider the following hint of it in the narrator's observation of Captain Craig after their first conversation:

'I marked

An unmistakeable self-questioning

And a reticence of unassumed regret.

The two together made anxiety

Not selfishness, I ventured.' (p.123)

Contrariwise, a sudden intense discernment may flash across the page; for example when Captain Craig intones :

"The ways of unimaginative man

Are singularly fierce" (p.147)

while his aphoristic turn of speech is often sagacious and good-humored;

"There is nothing ...

so beneficial in a sick-room

As a well-bred spontaneity of manner." (pp.146-7)

The perception of character and refinement of thought are two aspects of the complex evolution of psychological themes that greatly enhance the modernity and appeal of the poem. As we have seen, realistic brush-strokes often contribute to the efficiency of scene. At times an almost stream-of-consciousness realism is detedtable. At a crucial moment a few minutes before the Captain died, and when he was too far away to make his friends 'search the futile shelves' of their thoughts for something insincere to say, the narrator records that:

'The marrowy sense

Of slow November rain that splashed against

The shingles and the glass reminded us

That we had brought umbrellas' (p.165)

There are also numerous deft atmospheric touches, such as the description of the shadows of dead leaves in the narrator's room 'swinging ... like black rags on a line' (p.121) Also unforgettable is the occasional, peculiarly Robinsonian, delight in the romance of the commonplace of which the narrator's description of his train journey is a fine example. He smokes a cigar, watches 'The flying mirrors for a mile or so' until he drifts into a typical mood of train-travelling day-dream; -

'A gleam of long-forgotten strenuous years

Came back, when we were Red Men on the trail,

With Morgan for the big chief Wocky-Bocky;'

until 'yawning out of that' he sets himself

'To face again the loud monotonous ride

That lay before me like a vista drawn

Of bag-racks to the fabled end of things.' (p.124)

Another example of admirable writing is to be seen in the metaphysical effectiveness of the final paragraph of the poem; it is worth comparing with the concluding lines of Brennan's "Wanderer" and points the way forward to the clear, chiselled world of Edwin Muir's poems.

'The ways have scattered for us, and all things

Have changed; and we have wisdom, I doubt not,

More fit for the world's work than we had then!.. (p.168)

Now and then the memory of the Captain's death returns, bringing back the day of the funeral -

'A windy, dreary day with a cold white shine,

Which only gummed the tumbled frozen ruts

That made us ache. The road was hard and long,

But we had what we knew to comfort us,

And we had the large humor of the thing

To make it advantageous.' (p.169)

The attempt has been made in the present chapter to outline the smiling pathos of Captain Craig's Divine Comedy, and to elucidate the psychological complexities of the poem. It is no simple matter to suggest what final synthesis Captain Craig has to offer, and perhaps one should content oneself with some general remark to the effect that in the poem Man occupies the centre of the world's tragi-comic stage and the mind of man is

the soul of aspiration. Perhaps Captain Craig had the last word when he says :

"There is no servitude so fraudulent
As of a sun-shut mind; for't is the mind
That makes you craven or invincible,
Diseased or puissant. The mind will pay
Ten thousand fold and be the richer then
To grant new service; but the world pays hard..." (p.166)

NOTES

- 1 Winters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.p.97-98.
- 2 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.154.
- 3 Tendencies in Modern American Poetry, p.35.
- 4 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.98.
- 5 He says elsewhere "I am not Socrates" (p.154) and "Had I been Socrates ..." (p.162)
- 6 Captain Craig refers to his earlier days in his first letter as "days When I had hounds and credit" etc. (p.127)
- 7 Sophocles statement above is reiterated and elaborated, for instance on p.140.
- 8 There are approximately twenty five references to the sun and its light and twelve references to 'light', while there are about fifteen references to shadows and darkness. The verbal range of each symbol is widened by the inclusion of various words which suggest light or darkness. Examples of the former are 'spark', 'sunny', 'shine', 'brilliance', 'flash' etc; and of the latter, 'twilight', 'midnight', 'ghosts', 'dreary', 'sullen', 'barren', 'gloom', 'black', 'gray', 'dungeon', etc. Other antitheses occur between life and death, heaven and hell, fertility (or water) and desert etc., and so increase the range of verbal elusiveness.

- 9 Captain Craig regretted that he had neglected the opportunities he had to be charitable, and reflects on "thoughts I might have moulded" (p.151) and sad, hungry faces that might have been brightened.
- 10 cf. the Captain's questions: "So it has come to this? And what is this? Death, do you call it? Death? And what is death? (p.165) Suicide is also referred to on p.p.117, 126, 141.
11. cf. Fernando Nash.
- 12 This, however, is not to deny the possible allusion to Christ. Jesus forewarned the disciples of his crucifixion and referred to the cup of death he must drink. See St. Matthew, 20, 22, and St. John 18, 11.
- 13 The word "poet" is used in a wide sense and includes the religious martyr.
- 14 See note 13 above.
- 15 The image may also represent, by association, a mother figure.
- 16 cf. line, 19, p.168.
- 17 cf. Hamlet's longing for death and the reference to the phrase in his famous soliloquy. The alluring quality of death is stressed by the description of its kingdom as 'A fertile place'.

Chapter 5

THE PROBLEM OF AVON'S HARVEST

(1)

Critics of Robinson have lacked unanimity in their appraisals of Avon's Harvest - appraisals occasionally disquieted and unconfident - and this is not altogether surprising in view of the construction of the poem; the type of characterisation attempted, and what can be gathered of the author's own inconsistent attitude to it. Even after affording due respect to criticism's validity as a discipline built upon disparity of judgement, one is tempted to side with critic and reader alike when they complain that the poem is 'difficult' and at times incomprehensible. Consider, for example, Ivor Winters' objections to the poem. He says it lacks "seriousness" because "the story never gets beyond the intention to awaken horror for its own sake." He adds that it is inconscivable as a study in "remorse" and "fear" because "the consequences are out of all proportion to the initial act ... unless in both cases we assume that Avon is abnormal at the outset and progressively becomes insane." Winters declares that if this is the case the poem has no claim to be considered as art because it abandons "the realm of normal human nature and of moral action."¹ This argument is indeed crucial and cannot be ignored by anyone who wishes to offer an appreciation of the poem. It is especially significant, too, being possibly the one occasion when a serious critic has accused Robinson of lacking seriousness, a quality which critics have unanimously acknowledged and applauded in

his work. Whether or not Winters implies a distinction between 'seriousness' and 'high seriousness' is ^{un}arguable, but his depreciation of the poem on the grounds of horror is debatable. It is necessary to inquire, then, if the poem does 'awaken' other qualities than horror, and to investigate the possibility that Robinson employed horror as a means of particularising deeper and wider aspects of human nature through the cumulative intensity of horror and the corresponding effects upon personality. Does the poet employ other than 'shock tactics'? does the poem transcend melodrama? what kind of horror is depicted in the poem and is it relevant to something more inclusive? - these are questions which are relevant to the work of interpretation.

Winters' answers are not the only ones. Charles Cestre, for example, expresses a contrary opinion. The French critic describes Avon's Harvest as "a story of haunting fear, with a tinge of madness in it", but says that underlying it is "a deep current
2
of broad and universal humanity." He regards the poem as a significant study in psychology and finds that it has artistic merit, a point of view which provides the basis of the so-called psychological interpretation. Cestre does not isolate the element of horror from its antecedents, "wonder", "anxiety", "pity", or the "mental mystery" which hovers about it. Moreover, he proposes that horror is a legitimate element for an artist to explore and that in doing so he may successfully reveal the 'realm' of human nature:

"The poet's artistry somewhat recalls the manner of Edgar A. Poe, by the careful successive approaches toward the crowning revelation and by the concentration

of interest on the topic that more and more engrosses our mind. Descriptions of the outward bewildered state of the man alternate with vivid pictures of the inner tragedy, and the effect of his narrative on the listening friend is recorded with peerless mastery. Robinson has a surer grasp than Poe of the secret workings of the soul. When, at the end, a ghost is introduced, we feel that it is not a cheap romantic device, but an exteriorisation of the inward vision, a filmy projection into the twilight mist of the feverish hallucination that floats in the sick man's subconsciousness. Robinson remembers the blood-curdling sights of hellish horrors that used to appal the early Puritans, and he makes Avon an heir to their gloomy moping. His manner suggests a combination of Hawthorne's analysis with Poe's spectral creations, with more of the Scarlet Letter than of the House of Usher. Yet the resulting effect is entirely his own. Avon's madness arises from a disturbed conscience, whose self-torturing propensity is magnified by his diseased condition."³

Elisworth Barnard, whose judgement is always to be respected, misrepresents Cestre's argument by classifying it, along with Louise Danner's, as a moral interpretation. Danner's argument may be so described - although 'moral' is a confusing term - but it is based on the realisation that Avon's Harvest is "highly psychological in emphasis."⁴ Clearly Robinson does include

the effects of 'guilty conscience' among the psychic machinations of the central character; however, Cestre, in this case, prefers to regard conscience as a psychological entity related to an individual condition, rather than as a moral entity related to a spiritual absolute, as does Dauner. One has only to quote from the core of the latter's interpretation to realise how fundamentally it ignores the challenge of Winters' statement that "the consequences are out of all proportion to the initial act." Dauner, employing the spiritual symbolism of the Light, writes:

"Had Aven possessed the Light, he would have been able to view a youthful indiscretion and the object of his aversion in their proper perspective. Normally, he would have seen in the situation at worst a relationship to tax his tolerance and self-control; in the incident of his surrender to sudden passion, an occasion for regret and possible atonement."⁵

Yet Dauner goes on to admit that the deed "assumes pathological significance and becomes the obsession of his life,"⁶ and one suspects there is more in this 'youthful indiscretion' than meets the eye. Aven's ^{is a} psychoneurotic problem which has too mundane an occasion to be considered as a spiritual drama of Light and Darkness; the poem is purely a psychic drama with the only protagonists existing in an individual mind, playing not for paradise, or absolute values, but for the sanity of a single person. This is not a denial that archetypal and archaic spiritual symbolism is incorporated into the arena of psychological conflict, nor is it to be taken as a denial that darkness is a fully-wrought symbol

in the poem. And, of course, there is, as Cestre suggests, an ingrained configuration of the Puritan mind behind Avon's mask. Avon wonders "Whether it was" "because of

"some accrued arrears of ancestors

Who throve on debts that I was here to pay,

Or sins within me that I knew not of,

Or just a fibetaste of what waits in hell..." (p.548)

that his adversary was thrust upon him.

Thus, before discarding the moral interpretation it would be well to remember that certain metaphysical speculations appear in the poem. Avon attempts to consider his problem in terms of a superior and universal justice or deity, only to find that such speculation gives him no satisfaction (it merely serves to expedite his collapse more efficiently), because he lacks faith in the existence of a greater, compensating good. Miss Dauner's insistence that an unspecified spiritual deficiency is the cause of Avon's obsession is a miscalculation confusing cause and effect: the basic implications either way are first and foremost psychological. Avon is a sick man who projects his sickness upon things outside himself and regards the cosmos in terms of his personal sickness. If Robinson has indicated a moral point of view at all, it is most likely to be found in the comments and attitude of the narrator. Indeed on one occasion the narrator does reprimand Avon for his eccentric thinking and conduct and reminds him that he personally clings "somewhat Affectionately to the old tradition." (p.547)

Barnard agrees with Yver Winters' objections to a psychological interpretation of Avon's Harvest. Winters says that

"If the story is to be regarded as a serious study in abnormal psychology, there are two objections to be made to it : we do not know enough about the actual facts of the case to understand it, and abnormal psychology is a proper subject for science but not for poetry, as it simply lacks general relevance; we may understand the abnormal mind theoretically and we may pity it, but we cannot share its experience in any important amount."

7

The first objection expresses the essential difficulty of the poem. Avon's account of the origin of his neurotic condition on the surface appears to be incomprehensible. Is it conceivable that a schoolboy hatred and altercation could drastically affect a person's life for twenty years and finally effect his destruction? One is forced to postulate immediately that the relationship must have provoked an extraordinarily traumatic experience activated by intense and deep-seated irrational forces. One is forced to look for a psychological explanation.

Hence it must be admitted forthwith that any rational explanation of Avon's story depends upon a much greater degree of inference than Robinson usually demands. The enigmatic, manifest content seems too exclusive, too insoluble; the reader complains naturally that the poet has afforded him too few admissions. Miss Bates, in describing Robinson's method, has said that "It was as if he liked to leave the enigma undisturbed, when brought face to face with it. Something was lost in the process of elucidation."

8

Many readers feel that in Avon's Harvest the method has been strained beyond endurable limits. Robinson has said that he liked to leave a poem with a fringe around it, but one is inclined, after a first reading, to feel that the fringe around Avon's Harvest is more like an impenetrable fog. And one is forced to the unhappy conclusion that the self-analytical faculty which dominates the story is insufficiently crystallised so that a timorous degree of repression existed in the poet side by side with the uncomfortable suppressions of the central character. Not only is Avon inadequately self-aware; but there are times when the poet has seemed unaware of exactly what he is about. His doubt is expressed in the doubtful appellation, metrical dime novel, which he only half-jocularly ascribed to the poem.

Yet the fact remains that Avon's Harvest has been continually considered as a work of intense psychological realism, and the success of this realism may be attributed in part to a deficiency in self-awareness. Why, then, have the attempts to explore a compatible line of interpretation been so meagre? It has already been conceded that there are unquestionable difficulties involved, but objections such as Winters' can only be examined on their merits after considerable analysis and reflection - especially in the case of a poem thirty pages in length. Cestre's comments, however, admirable, are few. He suggests a line of approach without investigating it, while Winters denies the validity of such an approach on the opinionated basis of unsubstantiated generalisations. Barnard cites Emory Neff and Mark Van Doren as exponents of a psychological interpretation, but both interpret very little and each is capable even of an error in simple matters

of detail. Neff emphasises that Avon's Harvest is a story of "obsessive fear", while Van Doren declares justly that it is much more than a 'metrical dime novel';

"It is of course no such thing; it is rather a particularly intense study of the corrupting effects of single-minded hate and fear when no other emotions are allowed room in a closed soul."

But neither critic admitted or attempted to answer Winters' first objection.

Winters' other objection does not in fact preclude a psychological interpretation of the poem. It expresses an aesthetic point of view with which Robinson was not entirely sympathetic; hence the corollary that Winters' is not always sympathetic to Robinson is quite understandable. There is little point in arguing the case one way or another, or of delving into literary history, for 'normality' and 'abnormality' are terms which are not readily amenable to definition and which may have different meanings for different people. It is relevant, therefore, to indicate where possible the poet's attitude to the problem at issue in order to avoid the kind of confusion to which Barnard alludes but himself fails to escape altogether. In the case of Avon's Harvest, however, it must be remembered (in fairness to Winters) that the poet's attitude was somewhat mysterious and ambivalent. This will be discussed later in relation to certain inconsistencies in the poem and the apparent change in purpose from melodramatic to psychological considerations.

Quoting Winters and Miss Evans, Barnard says that
 "Mr. Winters is right in saying that if the poem is
 'to be regarded as a serious study in abnormal psychology ...
 we do not know enough about the actual facts of the
 case to understand it.' In this connection, Robinson
 told Miss Evans that he was not 'interested in the
 exploration of pathological extremes.' " 10

But there is no specific reference to Avon's Harvest, as
 'in this connection' could imply, for Miss Evans makes no mention
 of the poem. Robinson was speaking fairly generally. What
 must be acknowledged, however, is the poet's interest in the
 universal propensity for neurosis, and his demonstration of the
 psychological law that people have within their temperament the
 potentiality for unusual thoughts, feelings and ways of behaving.
 He acknowledges the importance of the so-called 'determining
 factors', and these are also allied with his personal fatalistic
 philosophy. In 1913 he defined his 'message' as

"... a faint hope of making a few of us understand
 our fellow creatures a little better, and realize what
 a small difference there is after all between ourselves
 as we are and ourselves not only as we might have
 been but as we would have been if our physical
 and temperamental make-up and environment have been
 a little different." 11

This is a logical extension of a much earlier attitude expressed
 in the remark to a friend that he had "always confessed fatalistic
 tendencies in things both great and small." 12 Unlike some of

his critics he was meticulously aware of the small difference - the wavering degrees - between action and inaction, acceptance and rejection, between the significant psychic polarities of the human mind. Robinson intuitively comprehended the hard-won fact that any attempt to enforce a rigid distinction between the normal mind and the abnormal mind was highly confusing and artificial, while his perception of nuance and apparently unimportant details made him shrewdly aware of the many practical distinctions of which the average person is unaware. Many of Robinson's observations bear witness to Freud's statement that "great things may be revealed even by small indicators."¹³

He was preoccupied poetically with problems similar to those with which Freud was concerned therapeutically. He speaks like a clinical psychologist when, in one of those rare moments, he theorises about his task which, for man and poet, was unifiably one:

" ... I do a considerable amount of observing. In fact I observe so much that my feet often slip and I am forever stumbling over little things that other men never notice. This is one of my drawbacks, but it is not without its benefits; it opens one's eyes to the question of happiness and leads him to analyse that mysterious element of human nature from many points of view. I have discovered by this means that most of my own happiness is of a negative quality - a kind of sublimed selfishness, so to speak."¹⁴

The association of ideas, he learned early, may provoke some uncomfortable and incongruous, but nevertheless stimulating, ideas:

"You have no idea how much associations are to me.

Some little thing, almost ridiculous in itself,
acquires a value in my eyes that sometimes makes
me ashamed of myself." 15

This clinical method underlies Avon's Harvest. In the light of the above statements, the following (quoted by Nancy Evans) embraces a perspective which Barnard, who also quoted Miss Evans, seems to have overlooked:

"In talking of his men Mr. Robinson said,
'Well, for that matter, I suppose anyone who
leaves the middle of the road is abnormal in
one way or another.' " 16 (p.677)

Most of his characters diverged from the middle of the road at one time or another, and though he is loath to number 'pathological extremes' among their ranks, they include a large variety of cured and uncured neurotics - 'pensioners of dreams' and 'debtors of illusions.' (p.453) And Robinson's conception of such terms as pathological, normal, abnormal, sane and insane etc. does not necessarily concur with those preconceived in readers' and critics' minds.

Robinson's purpose was not, of course, to theorise human dynamics, but to render to the best of his ability these dynamics in dramatic contexts. It is not surprising that his realm of human nature includes a much wider diversity of character than that of most modern poets, for he was more interested in the question of the universal neurosis of mankind than any other poet of his

generation. As early as 1894 he declared, "I must acknowledge the dismal truth that the majority of mankind interest me only as studies. They are to me "a little queer", like the Quaker's wife." ¹⁷ Thus, even a brief and limited acknowledgment of Robinson's representation of mankind is interesting and impressive. He has scrutinised the crime of passion; written about a psychopath in "En Passant"; outlined the malevolent and primitive, as well as noble, nature of man's unconscious self; compiled a gallery of suicides and declared with characteristic self-control that "suicide signifies discouragement or despair" and is "beyond the scope of .. human censure;" ¹⁸ explained the crime and punishment theme in Cavender's House and King Jasper (poems in which he analyses the thoughts and emotions of two different types of murderers); and magnificently elaborated upon the notion that the great love story of Tristram has a universal basis exemplified in divorce courts every where. This is merely a fragmentary indication of his aggregate of humanity, a humanity containing numerous divergences from the norm in which the ironical abnormality of the norm is clearly demonstrable. He was not simply jesting when, avowing to Amy Lowell that the best of her vers libre was 'almost exclusively "human" in its subject matter', he praised the importance of psychological content,

"the good and bad solid old-fashioned human qualities that make us all one crazy family of children, throwing things at each other across the table, and making faces at each other in saecula saeculorum. " ¹⁹

There are many instances in Robinson's poetry of a verification of a Freudian hypothesis axiomatic in psychoanalytical thought.

Freud writes in the Introductory Lectures :

"The healthy man ... is ... virtually a neurotic, but

the only symptom that he seems capable of developing

is a dream. To be sure when you subject his waking

life also to a critical investigation you discover

something that contradicts this specious conclusion;

for this apparently healthy life is pervaded by

innumerable trivial and practically unimportant

symptom-formations." 20

This statement may well apply to the characterization of Captain Craig, as we have already discovered, while it is pertinent to

observe that Robinson once expressed the thought in another way. Part of a letter to a friend contained the following statement:

"There is more in every person's soul than we think.

Even the happy mortals we term ordinary or commonplace

act their own mental tragedies and live a far deeper

and wider life than we are inclined to believe possible

in the light of our prejudices." 21

The secret tragedies, weaknesses and discrepancies of apparently

healthy individuals have been consistently exposed by the poet.

He has indicated as well the progressive disintegration or reintegration

attendant upon personality structure. Some critics consider that

Avon's Harvest is a study of the first process, although Bernard

exteriorizes the process completely:

"In the eyes of the narrator ... Avon is a thoroughly

decent (and except for his one obsession) completely sane person. His fate simply cannot be rationalised. And, therefore I suggest that the poem deals with the intrusion into human life of evil that is uncaused, inexplicable." ²²

But Barnard had earlier described this evil as a mind-created entity:

"...Robinson deliberately refuses to draw the line between the "real" and the "imaginary" that we apply in our normal rule-of-thumb test for sanity. In Avon's Harvest, for instance, the power of mind-created entities is so great as to destroy the life of their creator - not indirectly by bending his will to suicide, but against his will, directly and violently Whatever killed him was "unreal" ... Yet, outside from this one obsession, the poem contains no hint that he was not perfectly sane." ²³

These two accounts of the poem cannot be easily reconciled and their author draws a too severe demarkation between normality and abnormality. The same contradiction appears in each passage. Clearly Avon's 'one obsession' must and does affect his total personality in an adverse way ; hence Barnard's reservation and his abstract use of the word 'sane' are misleading. Avon is not necessarily insane, but he is far from well. He is a victim of certain emotional disturbances which have reached neurotic proportions. For the most part he is neither 'perfectly sane' nor completely insane, but belongs in that in-between flux of neurotic instability bordering on psychosis and disintegration. Barnard's interpretation

of the poem (the first passage above) is nothing more than a synopsis of Avon's central point of view. Avon vainly attempts to rationalise his fate, to exteriorise his 'mind created entities' and fabricate reality, which denotes a neurotic attitude to life characteristic of his disease.

The beginning of Avon's narration of his story is significant in relation to the above remarks, for it draws attention to the time when Avon began to leave 'the middle of the road', and it is couched in the phraseology of madness as the narrator recognises. Avon was a potentially normal person, attaining in boyhood "an even-tempered average Among the major mediocrities" (p.547); but his life changed and his mind succumbed to a 'tinge of madness'. Here is the relevant passage with its increasingly wild and extravagant accents:

"I was a boy at school, sixteen years old,
 And on my way, in all appearances,
 To mark an even-tempered average
 Among the major mediocrities
 Who serve and earn with no especial noise
 Or vast reward. I saw myself, even then,
 A light for no high shining; and I feared
 No boy or man - having, in truth, no cause.
 I was enough a leader to be free,
 And not enough a hero to be jealous.
 Having eyes and ears, I knew that I was envied,
 And as a proper sort of compensation
 Had envy of my own for two or three -

But never felt, and surely never gave,
The wound of any more malevolence
Than decent youth, defeated for a day,
May take to bed with him and kill with sleep.
So, and so far, my days were going well,
And would have gone so but for the black tiger
That many of us fancy is in waiting,
But waits for most of us in fancy only.
For me there was no fancy in his coming,
Though God knows I had never summoned him,
Or thought of him. To this day I'm adrift
And in the dark, out of all reckoning,
To find a reason why he ever was,
Or what was ailing Fate when he was born
On this alleged God-ordered earth of ours.
Now and again there comes one of his kind -
By chance, we say. I leave all that to you.
Whether it was an evil chance alone,
Or some invidious juggling of the stars,
Or some accrued arrears of ancestors
Who throve on debts that I was here to pay,
Or sins within me that I knew not of,
Or just a foretaste of what waits in hell
For those of us who cannot love a worm, -
Whatever it was, or whence or why it was,
One day there came a stranger to the school.
And having had one mordacious glimpse of him

That filled my eyes and was to fill my life,
 I have known Peace only as one more word
 Among the many others we say over
 That have an airy credit of no meaning." (pp.547-49)

The narrator winces at this language, not that of the former Avon he had known, describing it as 'off the key Calamitously'. The delusive world of 'fancy' ('a tired man's fancy' as Avon says later p.557) and 'the black tiger' with the whole weight of the dynamic unconscious behind it, therefore, is revealed quite early in the poem as something smothering Avon's being. The final and overwhelming stultification of the ego and its power to act is aptly conveyed by Avon, near the end of the poem, by reference to the same metaphors:

"... I found I was immovable

...

I began to fancy there was on me
 The stupor that explorers have alleged
 As evidence of nature's final mercy
 When tigers have them down upon the earth
 And wild hot breath is heavy on their faces". (pp.570-71)

Avon's Harvest is highly introspective and vindicates Louis Ledoux' assessment of Robinson. Ledoux, one of the poet's closest friends, described Robinson's interest as "Primarily psychological" and concerned with "individual character". He said that Robinson "probed and dug with zeal and indefatigable patience for those secret springs from which issue the actions and inactions whose

aggregate make up a life." ²⁴ So do his characters, but with unequal success. The narrator's

'delving hitherto

Has been a forage of his own affairs' (p.544)
while Avon strives

"to see clear enough,

To fish the reason out of a black well". (p.555)

Robinson perceived that a healthy life was dependent on a proper harmony of 'action' and 'inaction', and that serious disturbance could result from a harmful degree of inaction or exaggerated, misdirected action. The result is a kind of Hamlet complex and Avon suffers from it. He regarded his significant actions as morbid and unhealthy, while his inactions were soul-destroying and lacked the fruitful benefits of constructive and creative reflection. Robinson, like Freud, adheres to a simple and practical principle in the analysis of character. Freud said in the Introductory Letters that

"The difference between nervous health and nervous illness (neurosis) is narrowed down ... to a practical distinction, and is determined by the practical result - how far the person concerned remains capable of a sufficient degree of capacity for enjoyment and active achievement in life. The difference can probably be traced back to the proportion of the energy which has remained free relative to that of the energy which has been bound by repression..." ²⁵

Clearly Avon is incapable 'of a sufficient degree of capacity for enjoyment and active achievement in life'. Avon's life lacked a purposeful deployment of his energies since that traumatic occasion when repression no longer held them in check and he struck his school-boy adversary:

"All I remember is a bursting flood

Of half a year's accumulated hate,

And his incredulous eyes before I struck him?" (p.555)

In later years, however, the memory of this action appears, psychologically, to serve the interests of repression and to escape its consequences. Repression of associations and escape are fortified by an exaggerated and distorted conception of the results of this one action. Blind magnification is, of course, a common symptom among the psychoneuroses, especially paranoia, and some of Avon's reactions are characteristic of this particular disease.

It is clear that the outlet of Avon's energy proved not only inadequate but also harmful. He says to his friend

"You know that I have driven the wheels too fast

Of late, and all for gold I do not need"

whereupon the narrator silently observes that 'Avon ... Had driven the wheels too fast, and not for gold.' (pp.557-58). The inevitable culmination is Avon's exanimate condition - his complete loss, or negation, of energy when he lost all sense of reality and succumbed to a world of phantasy and hallucination in

"... a sort of conscious, frozen catalepsy

Wherein a man sees all there is around him

As if it were not real, and he were not

Alive, You may call it anything you please

"That made me powerless to move hand or foot." (p.569)

Avon had lost all capacity to muster his energies in order to deal adequately with life ... he lingered on, admittedly, but he was already a dead man.

It is, therefore, difficult to concur with Barnard's opinion that 'In the eyes of the narrator ... Avon is a thoroughly decent and (except for his one obsession) completely sane person.' The nature and scope of Avon's 'one obsession' is not as easily defined as Barnard would have us believe; moreover, the narrator indicates that he is very much aware of the seriousness of Avon's state, and increasingly appreciates the reality of the disintegration which is taking place before his eyes. The narrator's observations are largely taken up with eye-witness descriptions of nervous and neurotic signs perceivable in Avon's speech and behaviour and implicit in his story. This is made clear, for instance, in the opening lines of Avon's Harvest. The narrator describes the fear that 'made of a gay friend whom we had known Almost a memory', and recounts that he and his friends had seen 'horribly' for some time that 'The fire of death ... Consumed him while he crumbled and said nothing'. (p.543) At the end, the physician confirms that the real cause of Avon's trouble was psychological rather than physical, a point of view the narrator assumes from the outset. The narrator observes before the story is commenced that Avon was nervous and upset :

"... you ... seem distraught --

I mean distrait. I don't know what I mean". (p.546)

The innuendo that Avon is a little crazy is subtly suggested when the narrator hastily employs the less emphatic term, perhaps to disguise his observation and not alarm his friend unduly. It is not long, however, before the narrator 'knows what he means': Avon is seen to be in profound difficulty; he is 'Off the key Calamitously'. It was no surprise really and he had suspected it for some time:

'I knew that in my heart

There was no visitation of surprise.' (p.549)

He felt that he had no option but to regard Avon's case as hopeless - even without hearing the rest of

'the story of my friend

Who, as I feared, was not for me to save,

And, as I knew, knew also that I feared it'. (p.551)

The narrator, horrified at Avon's collapse, regarded death as inevitable:

'it was half as in expectancy

That I obeyed the summons of his wife

A little before dawn ... ' (p.572)

Barnard thus mistakes the extent of Avon's obsession and misconstrues the narrator's reactions. Moreover, the suggestion that "Avon is a thoroughly decent ... person" may also be open to doubt as Winters suggests when he describes Avon's Harvest as "a poem dealing with a pathological relationship which may or may not be tinged with homo-sexuality."²⁶ It seems, therefore, that Winters tends to regard Avon as a 'pathological extreme', while Barnard vigorously denies the assertion, regarding him as a fairly

ordinary person in the clutches of omnipotent evil, 'uncaused' and 'inexplicable', which strikes from without. But, indubitably, the study of Avon's Harvest is the study of Avon's mind.

(11)

A detailed analysis of Avon's Harvest is perhaps most favourably introduced by reference to three problems : the inconsistencies, the difficulties in the way of elucidation, the author's changed conception of the poem. David Brown in "A Note on Avon's Harvest" has performed a worthwhile service in discussing these problems. His argument revolves around the last of these, being based upon the changes Robinson made for the revised edition in the Collected Poems which appeared seven months after the poem's initial publication. Brown infers from the evidence he presents a changed attitude in the mind of the poet. The poem appears to have been conceived originally on rather melodramatic lines emphasising that sufficient interest ought to be derived from a story constructed upon the mystery formula. In such a case, of course, the credibility of the material facts would not be questioned. In the final version, however, such facts are omitted or relegated to a psychological frame of reference (thus rendering dubious their objective credibility) so that happenings in themselves no longer serve the interest of plot. The poem thus became a tale consisting 'of purely psychical elements' as Centre points out; it "ceased to be a 'metrical dime novel' ", as Brown says, " ... and became fully and clearly a study in the psychology of Avon and his harvest of fear and death from actions

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and thoughts sown in hate." Brown studies the developments leading up to the corrections of the revised edition and in fact justifies Cestre's psychological contentions. The main problem raised concerns the nature of Avon's experience in the Maine cabin when he sees his adversary return with ill intent : Brown and Cestre regard the experience as a hallucination.²⁸

Brown explains his point of orienation in the following sentences:

"Revision was the direct result of the response of the reviewers to the story. They had made a mistake in their reading of the poem, and Robinson revised it to take care of the error. But the interesting fact is that he revised in such a way as to legitimate the reviewers' interpretation rather than to correct it."²⁹

Brown notes that Robinson complained that reviewers of the first version misunderstood him "in one point of the plot; namely, that Avon's enemy was a real man - not a ghost - who left behind him a real knife."³⁰ Avon described how the knife was left:

"They found it on me with the point of it
Touching my throat." (p.62, V. 2-3)

Brown notices eight other references to the knife - prominently displayed on the dictionary - in the first version. Apart from dramatic considerations, the knife's importance concerns the matter of credibility as Brown correctly observes :

"When Avon begins his story, in the first version, the knife is the object to which he constantly alludes as a point of importance in the establishment of the credibility of his story.

'I waited, and anon became aware
 That I was looking less at Avon's eyes
 Than at another thing that had a gleam
 Quite of its own. "And what the devil's that?"
 I questioned. - "Only what you see", said Avon;
 "Merely a dagger on a dictionary.

Daggers are out of date, but there you are.

Take it; and if you like it, shave with it" : " 31

In the Collected Poems this is changed to :

'I waited, and anon became aware
 That I was looking less at Avon's eyes
 Than at the dictionary, like one asking
 Already why we made so much of words
 That have so little weight in the true balance.' (p.545)

A comparison between these two passages suggests why Robinson deleted all the references to the knife (with one questionable exception) in the revised edition. It is almost as if Robinson realised that Avon's character is more credible if his story isn't, that some of Avon's words have 'so little weight in the true balance', and that his explanations may not be substantially true however psychically real. The knife, a convenient weapon of melodrama, was not only 'out of date', but confused the issue once the prime consideration centred round Avon's mental disturbances. This realisation seemed to be the one important impression which later remained in the poet's mind, for as late as 1934 he referred to the controversial and 'radical change' :

" ... in the Collected Poems there is a radical change near the end of the poem in which I take out the material knife and leave the whole thing 'psychological'." ³²

As Brown says, "Robinson changed the poem by removing the dagger completely. All that was left of it was a "nixon -flash of metal", which now becomes an item in the story which may be legitimately regarded as a hallucination of Avon, since he alone sees it." ³³ And as it is the last thing that Avon recalls before he sinks into total unconsciousness, and considering that his state at the time is one of induced phantasy, the flash of metal may be presumed to have been part of the phantasy and possessed of psychic reality only. Barnard makes one objection to Brown's statement that reference to the knife was deleted entirely, and cites the highly ambiguous reference made by the narrator at the end of the poem - the narrator says :

'I was awake for hours,
Toiling in vain to let myself believe
That Avon's apparition was a dream,
And that he might have added, for romance,
The part that I had taken home with me
For reasons not in Avon's dictionary.' (p.572)

Barnard says that The part refers to the knife. If such is the case, however, it indicates carelessness on the part of Robinson, because there is no doubt of his intention to eliminate the knife from the story. Moreover, there is the suggestion that the narrator by mentioning 'for romance' seriously doubts the
credibility

of some aspects of Avon's account - a fact which supports the conclusion already tentatively offered in the comparison of the above two passages. The hallucinatory atmosphere is also suggested by the narrator's use of the words 'apparition' and 'dream' in reference to Avon's experience.

But the revised edition was obscured as well as simplified by the addition of lines at two points in the poem, as Brown notes:

"After Avon has described his sense of relief from fear with the news that his enemy has drowned, he adds:

'Pity a fool for his credulity

If so you must. But when I found his name

Among the dead, I trusted once the news.'

Later in the poem, in the midst of Avon's account of the attack by the enemy upon him in the Maine camp, there are four new lines, which appear here in italics:

'But all there was left now for me to do

....

' Through all those evil years before my respite -

Which now I knew and recognised at last

As only his more venomous preparation

For the vile end of a deceiving peace -!" 34

Brown argues that these lines were added before the process of deletion took place, but his reason is not the only possible one and these lines will be referred to later in order to show that they do not invalidate a psychological interpretation of the poem. Brown says:

"Robinson's addition of these lines, if he had made no further change, would have helped to make it

plain that Avon's enemy had not really been
 drowned. But Robinson did not leave the
 matter there, and having added, began the
 process of deletion and altering which we have noticed." ³⁵

Brown's summary 'of the revision of Avon's Harvest' is contained
 in the following passage:

"Robinson intended a poem which in its plot had a
 good many characteristics of a mystery thriller.
 His own gifts being those of an anatomist of human
 emotions, he naturally emphasised the psychological
 values inherent in the theme. His reviewers,
 expecting this, gave less weight to the external
 details of the story than this particular "metrical
 dime novel" required. Robinson, who probably never
 thought himself as subtle as his readers found him,
 was surprised at this error and planned, as he said
 to Mr. Carl Van Doren, to leave them no opportunity
 for error in his revision. But, after adding a
 few lines which were designed to prevent the mistake
 in the future, he changed his mind, and his second
 thought was better. Since his first readers had
 perceived the strength of the poem to lie in the
 presentation of the harvest of hallucination and
 death reaped by Avon from his experience of fear
 and hate, he would let these values stand unconfused
 by such dime-novel machinery as daggers. Thus, in
 the revised version, there is no question that the

experience of Avon by the Maine lake was a hallucination; or, if there is, the question is irrelevant, since the effect is the same, and the reader is not thrown off the centre of interest, which is Avon's mind and not a world of clues and evidences like knives. It now becomes clear that, while Avon thought the man had actually returned, the reader need not think so, since there is no external clue to prove that he did." 36

Other difficulties and inconsistencies which occur in the poem relate to the time schema, the self-contradictions in Avon's story, and certain discrepancies between Avon's statements and those of the narrator.

Avon, a former 'gay friend', had been hallowed by the 'fear' and 'death' in his eyes for 'so long'³⁷ that he had become 'Almost a memory'. (p.543). The occasions when he and the narrator had laughed together now 'seemed an age ago.' (p.545) Avon had changed drastically:

'Nothing in Avon lately

Was, or was ever again to be for us,

Like him that we remembered; and all the while

We saw that fire at work within his eyes

And had no glimpse of what was burning there.

So for a year it went ; and so it went

For half another year - ' (pp.543-44)

It is evident, therefore, that although the narrator could remember an earlier, happier Avon, he was aware that Avon had been a

changed man for a long time and that the change was particularly acute during the last eighteen months. He also notices that 'latterly' Avon's fear had infected his wife as well. (See pp.544,570)

Avon commences his story at the beginning when he "was a boy at school, sixteen years old" (p.547) and proceeds to relate the events which occurred during the fateful months from January to June - the time of the other boy's attachment, the time of his "half a year's accumulated hate". (p.555) This relationship of pity, hate, lecherous need (and whatever other elements may have composed it) existed twenty years previously, the occasion in his past to which he is fixated: his tale 'hovered among shadows and regrets Of twenty years ago'. (p.559) Presumably, then, Avon is thirty-six years of age at the time he narrates his story, which is thus a day before his thirty-seventh birthday because he says :

"Tomorrow I shall have another birthday

And with it there may come another message -" (p.572)

Avon's condition is ^{so}deteriorated that he became oblivious of the brighter side of life - of his own past happiness with friends and wife, though we are told virtually nothing of this last relationship apart from its resolution into a bond of fear. He is conscious that his neurotic condition, at first concealed from himself and his friends, progressively manifested itself "under the sickening weight of added years":

"There's a humiliation in it now,

As there was then, and worse than there was then;

For then there was the boy to shoulder it

Without the sickening weight of added years

Galling him to the grave". (p.550)

He was entangled in his own "slow net Of ... fantastic and increasing hate" (p.549) although he attempts numerous rationalisations to escape from responsibility in the matter of his downfall. These rationalisations alone - and he is their sole architect - are sufficient to torture him incessantly. Here is an example of this kind of evasion which relates, in this instance, to his remorse:

"I'm at odds

With conscience, even tonight, for good assurance

That it was I, or chance and I together,

Did all that sowing. If I seem to you

To be a little bitten by the question,

Without a miracle it might be true;

The miracle is to me that I'm not eaten

Long since to death of it, and that you sit

With nothing more agreeable than a ghost" (pp.551-52)

A person's endeavour to deny responsibility for his thoughts and feelings is one of the early signs of a surrendering and collapsing ego. The ironic implication, here, is that Avon's ego has already capitulated, for the narrator had described Avon as being not more than the ghost of his former self, while Avon's final surrender (a few hours later) is no surprise.

The time schema provides a framework for Avon's account of his enemy and the narration of certain details. It was "a day in June" when Avon struck him at school; the boy left the following

day, and Avon declares that he didn't see him again for ten years. On the day of the boy's departure, Avon met his enemy by chance and refused to apologise, whereupon his enemy made the threatening remark - 'I shall know where you are until you die'. Although the boy left, and Avon didn't see him again for ten years, it becomes clear that it was his psychological, not physical, presence, which was to strike terror in his soul. Avon says at different points in his story:

"It was in January

This evil genius came into our school,
And it was June when he went out of it -
If I may say that he was wholly out
Of any place that I was in thereafter." (p.554)

"The carriage rolled away

With him inside; and so it might have gone
For ten years rolling on, with him still in it,
For all it was I saw of him." (p.560)

During this period he had heard of him, "but only as one hears of leprosy", and received the annual message, so that he was never rid of him:

"He faded

Out of my scene - yet never quite out of it;
'I shall know where you are until you die',
Were his last words; and they were the same words
That I received thereafter once a year,
Infallibly on my birthday, with no name;

Only a card, and the words printed on it.

No I was never rid of him - not quite." (p.560)

The psychic presence of his destroying antagonist - largely unconscious until this stage - has become a potent, evil force according to Avon's description of him on the occasions in Rome and London when he saw him briefly. Although he has assumed overwhelming proportions in Avon's mind, however, Avon denies that he was yet afraid:

"I went away,

Though not for any fear that I could feel

Of him or of his worst manipulations." (p.562)

The following passage is crucially relevant to time, plot, and character, or more especially, the state of Avon's mind:

"My doom it was to see him,

Be where I might. That was ten years ago;

And having waited season after season

His always imminent evil recrudescence,

And all for nothing, I was waiting still,

When the Titanic touched a piece of ice

And we were for a moment where we are,

With nature laughing at us. When the noise

Had spent itself to names, his was among them;

And I will not insult you or myself

With a vain perjury. I was far from cold.

It seemed as for the first time in my life

I knew the blessedness of being warm;

And I remember that I had a drink,

Having assuredly no need of it.

Pity a fool for his credulity,

If so you must. But when I found his name

Among the dead, I trusted once the news;

And after that there were no messages

In ambush waiting for me on my birthday.

There was no vestige yet of any fear,

You understand - if that's why you are smiling." (pp.562-63)

Avon then proceeds to the final episode of his story, the experience in the Maine cabin, which we learn took place in the autumn immediately preceding the time at which he discloses his story.

It is at this stage that certain inconsistencies relating to time become evident. What are the relevant facts? To begin with, there are two important intervals of time which are not explicitly defined. The first is the interval from the end of the first ten years to the time of the Titanic disaster, vaguely referred to as "season after season"; and the second is the interval from the time of the disaster to the occasion of Avon's excursion to the Maine camp. It is impossible to know how long either interval was, although the first was apparently much longer than the second.

Next, attention is focused on the following of Avon's statements:-

1. The news of his enemy's death brought a sudden change, a new warmth, into Avon's life:

"It seemed as for the first time in my life

I knew the blessedness of being warm". (p.563)

2. "... after that there were no messages

In ambush waiting for me on my birthday." (p.563)

3. Referring to his excursion to the Maine camp, Avon explicitly states that it was very recent (it could not have been more than a year ago at the most) :

"Last October

He [Asher] took me with him into the Maine woods." (p.564)

4. Avon felt a new man, as Asher perceived ; Avon was:

"Alive at last with a new liberty

And with no sore to fester. He perceived

In me an altered favor of God's works,

And promptly took upon himself the credit." (p.564)

5. The period of respite from the time of the news of the man's death until the fateful evening when Avon was alone in the cabin was to Avon one of peace, and he did not recognise it as otherwise until it was terminated:

"There had been so much of waiting,

Through all those evil years before my respite -

Which now I knew and recognised at last

As only his more venomous preparation

For the vile end of a deceiving peace -" (p.511)

These statements provide evidence of self-contradiction and are in part unconsciously repudiated by the narrator ; hence the credulity of what Avon says is often questionable. Avon declared that news of the man's death brought a new-found period of peace (statements 1, 5). He felt a free and different man (statements 1, 4). Statement 2 indicates that Avon had felt a new man for some time - probably a few months at least - before

going to the Maine woods. (The use of the plural 'messages' is confusing, one message came annually, and only seems to suggest that the time was not short.) Yet Asher was only aware of the change as from the beginning of the sojourn together (statement 4), while the truly unaccountable fact is that the narrator obviously was at no time aware of the change Avon professes to have experienced. As we have seen, the narrator was emphatic that Avon had been sick and afraid for a long time, his condition being especially chronic during the last eighteen months, and that it was 'ages ago' since he had been his former, gay self. This contradicts statements 1 and 5, but the most serious contradiction is to be noted in view of statement 4. Some time before Avon went to the Maine woods, and for part of the time that he was there, he was supposedly at peace; yet this coincides with the time during which, as the narrator observed, Avon's condition was most severe. Had there been a respite at all it is unlikely that the narrator would have been previously unaware of it, unless, of course, it had no effect on Avon's condition and his new warmth had no more substance than a wish-fulfilment in a dream.

The above statements are also virtually contradicted by other statements and impressions, conveyed during the course of Avon's narrative. He continually denied that there was any period of peace and respite during the twenty-year period of surreptitiously increasing neurosis, although it is possible that his retrospections are dominated by his obsession at a time when it is strongest and his mind closer to collapse than ever before. Nevertheless, he does contradict statements 1, 4 and 5 when, early in the narrative, he describes the first occasion he saw his adversary :

"... having had one mordacious glimpse of him
 That filled my eyes and was to fill my life
 I have known peace only as one more word
 Among the many others we say over

That have an airy credit of no meaning." (pp.548-49)

He felt it was impossible to find the "coin of God" that would
 "pay the toll To peace on earth". (p.555) His attitude became
 nihilistic ; he was sure he had lost "disastrously, And ^{as} it was
 to prove, interminably." (p.554) Statements 1, 4 and 5 indicate
 a time when he felt free from his enemy, yet elsewhere he denies
 that he was ever free of him. "I was never rid of him", he said;
 whilst he was to declare some time before the Titanic disaster
 that he was "never again to move Without him at my elbow or
 behind me." (p.561) A similar inconsistency relates to Avon's
 denial of his fear. He says he never felt fear before the
 "last October" in the Maine woods when he was "at last ... afraid"....
 "I was afraid this time" (p.567), he confessed. This, of course,
 contradicts the narrator's evidence which emphasises that he had
 been afraid for some time prior to this October, and the doctor's
 evidence that Avon

"died ... because he was afraid -

And he had been afraid for a long time." (p.573)

Other inconsistencies are expressed in certain doubts and
 ambiguities relating to the other man's existence. Statement 1
 refers to Avon's belief that his enemy had drowned, and statement 5
 refers to his belief that his enemy had actually ^{not} drowned at all.
 If he finally believed his enemy was alive all the time (and

only pretended to have drowned) why does he on numerous occasions at the time he tells the story express doubt as to whether his enemy is alive or dead? Avon made the following confused references to him :-

" ... one man,

If he's alive. Whether he lives or not

Is rather for time to answer than for me;" (p.546)

"I don't know whether he's here alive,

Or whether he's here dead." (p.557)

" ... one man who is dead, or is not dead,

Or what the devil it is that he may be." (p.562)

Such confusion in Avon's mind suggests that little weight can be placed in what he says when he refers to the objective reality of his adversary. This, coupled with his suspicion that his adversary possessed supernatural powers, indicates that the experience in the Maine cabin was psychological; that is, a hallucination.

On the surface, theⁿ, it would appear that Avon endeavoured to attribute his condition to the work of the other person and to make it dependent upon the other person's physical existence. The attempt failed because it made no difference whether the man was alive or dead, because his psychical existence in Avon's mind - the only reality so far as Avon was concerned - was immutable and provided the nucleus of the destructive force which Avon was unable to conquer. The contradictions and inconsistencies analysed in the above paragraphs indicate that Avon, like any other

neurotic, was ignorant of the real - that is, unconscious - nature of his own condition. "I have driven the wheels too fast of late, and all for gold I do not need" Avon said, but we know that it was 'not for gold! It is clear, therefore, that the reliability of Avon's account of fact and feeling must be considered in relation to his psychological condition, and we have proved that Avon is not always reliable. We only have Avon's word for the material facts, and such is the blending of the real and the imaginary that it is necessary to doubt it. It is not inconceivable that Avon suffered from delusions, that the annual message, the report of his enemy's death, and his antagonist's final appearances were figments of imagination. It is also possible, however, that part of his unconscious mind knew the truth and was sceptical of its own delusions, and this could account for the conflict and ambiguity he felt regarding his adversary's presence, especially his inability to be rid of him even when he believed him dead. Avon's only certainty was one of doom.

(111)

It is incontestable that Avon's Harvest presents many problems which inhibit elucidation, and these have been examined so far in the light of the poet's injudicious omissions and confusions of detail, and ^{of} the central character's unconvincing account of the story. The essential problem, of course, revolves around the enigmatic Avon and his even more enigmatic adversary. Avon is a 'problematic' character, created and conveyed inferentially, who generally regards his case in this problematic light accompanied by an accentuated pessimism not inappropriate in a poem which deals with

a therapeutic situation in which there is no opportunity for therapy. The narrator, unlike Penn-Raven in Roman Bartholomew, is never in an authoritative position, nor does Avon desire him to be. For Avon considers himself damned and beyond salvation.

"Say what you like to say
To silence, but say none of it to me.
Tonight. To say it now would do no good,
And you are here to listen. Beware of hate
And listen. Beware of hate, remorse, and fear,
And listen. You are staring at the damned,
But yet you are no more the one than he
To say that it was he alone who planted
The flower of death now growing in his garden.
Was it enough, I wonder, that I struck him?
I shall say nothing. I shall have to wait
Until I see what's coming, if it comes,
When I'm a delver in another garden -
If such a one there be. If there be none,
All's well and over. Rather a vain expense,
One might affirm - yet there is nothing lost.

Science be praised that there is nothing lost."(pp.566-6

This speech is carefully inserted by Robinson to enable Avon to synthesise the strands of his attitude to his predicament centering as it does around his three emotional diseases for which he believes there is no "specific" in time. A mood of cynical despair and

determinism colours all he says. He exposes his own lack of knowledge and reluctance to be fully frank regarding the initial act, of which he can "say nothing". His pessimistic determinism is misplaced (as the narrator continually observes) for he attributes to the world of reality, among whose agents are fate and chance, the deterministic force which he fails to realise as belonging mainly in his own mind. Unable to face reality, he is only too prone to blame it for his ill - a peculiarly human reaction for which Robinson had no sympathy. The poet "would not accuse the ³⁹ "Scheme" of a disorder that belonged only to himself," for he was aware that such a reaction represented an escape from self-knowledge into neurosis. Avon declares that Fate was "ailing" when it created his adversary (p.548) and that it deliberately and maliciously toys with human suffering (p.554). He wonders if his predicament was due to "evil chance" (pp.548,551) and conjectures that ungovernable and unhappy chance had a fair share in bringing it about:

"the same unhappy chance

That first had fettered me and my aversion

To his unprofitable need of me

Brought us abruptly face to face again." (p.p.556-57)

Moreover, Avon hints unconsciously at a private impurity when, in furthering this projection of his sickness, he embodies it in the form of his enemy who thereby assumes super-human proportions:

"He fixed

His heart and eyes on me, insufferably, -

And in a sort of Nemesis-like way,

Invincibly."

(p.552)

What Avon saw in his enemy's eyes on that final occasion at school was to haunt him for twenty years and encroach upon and corrupt his perception of reality. "I was reading in his eyes", Avon says, "More than I read at college or at law In years that followed." (p. 557)

Avon's distorted sense of reality, then, is one vital aspect of his problem. We have seen that Avon's sense of fate stands in the way of salvation and that this combines powerfully with a brooding sense of inevitability to form a dark background for the mental actions of the poem. This tone is struck by the narrator early in the poem when, referring to Avon and his wife, he imagines in an image of finality Avon's 'fall':

'the fall

Of a dim curtain over the dark end

Of a dark play.' (p.544)

There is not much room for light. Avon hopes to provide his friend with a light out of a "black well", but the narrator can see little but darkness:

' "I see the well",

I said, "but there's a doubt about the glimmer -

Say nothing of the light." ' (pp.545-46)

Yet, even if it is obvious to Avon and his friend that there is to be no light for him, Avon does feel the need for confession. In itself it is no cure, but it is a necessary, final gesture - the natural act of a dying man. Avon possesses sufficient self-knowledge to realise the propensity of his ailment: "Sick as I was with hate Reborn", he says "and chained with fear that was more than fear." (p.570) His knowledge of himself was far from complete,

though he claims, as might be expected, "I have told you all there is to tell". (p.571) But he had steadfastly refrained from saying anything about his trouble until immediately before his end, and all the while his friends had seen "that fire at work within his eyes And had no glimpse of what was burning there." (p.544) His undue temperamental reticence had prevented earlier confession or friendly enquiry. Avon

"Fed with his unrevealing reticence

The fire of death we saw that horribly

Consumed him while he crumbled and said nothing." (p.543)

This reticence was itself fed by a repressive force allied with strong feelings of shame, guilt, and loathing. The 'darkness and discomfort of 'Avon's 'oblique rebuff' and his demand for 'silence' formed a neurotic protection against any attempt to penetrate the repressive barrier. The words of the narrator indicate how completely repression had conquered a realistic attitude towards life:

'My silence honored his, holding itself

Away from a gratuitous intrusion

That likely would have widened a new distance

Already wide enough, if not so new.' (p.543)

The narrator's "delving hitherto Had been a forage of his own affairs", and, amateur psychologist as he was, he knew that the quest into the repressed unconscious was "irksome". (p.544) Nevertheless, "it was Avon's time to talk", although he was psychologically unable to tell "all there is to tell". (p.545)

For one thing, he is an exaggerated victim of Robinsonian enigma:

he expresses the belief that his especial human problem is at heart ununderstandable and that "one's interpretation of another" (p.564) is generally inaccurate. He is unaware of the unconscious determinants of much of what he says, especially of his descriptions of his adversary, but frequently admits that much remains obscure to him. Even though it is too late for reparation, the need to articulate the dimensions of his problem and find at least some despairing measure of perspective was overpowering. These several aspects are alluded to when Avon says profoundly:

"Be patient, and you'll see just what I mean -
Which is to say you won't. But you can listen,
And that's itself a large accomplishment
Uncrowned; and may be, at a time like this,
A mighty charity". (pp.553-54)

His need 'to tell' had become obsessive; when the narrator threatened to leave Avon because he was 'distract' and was not making sense, Avon begged his friend to stay and accordingly locked the door.

Confession is an incomplete outlet for suppressed thoughts and emotions. Much more lurked behind Avon's 'one confessed remorse' than he could articulate. As we have seen, Avon's Harvest is concerned with the question of knowledge and self-knowledge attenuated in Avon's case by characteristics of reticence, morbid imaginings, and unhealthy introspections. 'There is knowing and knowing'. Avon's problem is one common to the therapeutic situation and has been adequately delineated by Freud who says:

"Our theory does its work by transforming something
unconscious into something conscious, and only succeeds

in its work in so far as it is able to effect this transformation ... According to the conclusions we have reached so far, neurosis would be the result of a kind of ignorance, a not-knowing of mental processes which should be known ... If only it were so ! But we have made discoveries that we were quite unprepared for at first. There is knowing and knowing; they are not always the same thing. There are various kinds of knowing, which psychologically are not by any means of equal value ... Knowing on the part of the physician is not the same thing as knowing on the part of the patient and does not have the same effect ... there is more than one kind of ignorance. It requires a considerable degree of insight and understanding of psychological matters in order to see in what the difference consists. But the proposition that symptoms vanish with the acquisition of knowledge of their meaning remains true, nevertheless. The necessary condition is that the knowledge must be founded upon an inner change in the patient which can only come about by a mental operation directed to that end." 42

Avon is unable to dissipate the autonomous strength of subconscious forces and bring them into consciousness under control. He fails to achieve the 'inner change' which Freud mentions. There are things Avon knows and things he does not know. He is aware of his friend's concern and is not blind to the need of

achieving self-enlightenment nor the difficulty of doing so.
 He declares that his 'purpose' in inviting his friend to listen
 to his story

"is to make you know

How clearly I have known that you have known
 There was a reason waited on your coming,
 And, if it's in me to see clear enough,
 To fish the reason out of a black well
 Where you see only a dim sort of glimmer
 That has for you no light." (p.545)

The narrator says he knows 'nothing', but Avon replies:

"You know as much

As any man alive - save only one man,
 If he's alive. Whether he lives or not
 Is rather for time to answer than for me;
 And that's a reason, or a part of one,
 For your appearance here. You do not know him,
 And even if you should pass him in the street
 He might go by without your feeling him
 Between you and the world. I cannot say
 Whether he would, but I suppose he might." (p.546)

Avon's adversary is thus presented more like a creature of his
 unconscious, a psychic force, than a real person; hence the
 narrator's belief that Avon is half-crazed, the difficulty of
 visualising this force as a person; hence the ambiguity as to
 the state of such a person's existence. Possibly the ambiguity
 results from an association of death with the unconscious and life

with consciousness. The phrase "Between you and the world" indicates that 'he' exists in a psychic hemisphere and the likelihood of the narrator not feeling 'him' may be explicable on the grounds that such a denizen didn't belong in the narrator's psyche, or if it did it would be sufficiently weak never to make its presence felt.

What the narrator increasingly understands of Avon's malady is intuitive, accurate in a general sense, and is derived from a normal way of looking at things; whereas what Avon senses is derived from a confused and abnormal way of looking at things. After listening to the first part of Avon's disordered outburst the narrator says "I knew that in my heart There was no visitation of surprise." (p.549) Avon, however, realises retrospectively that he had acted mainly from ignorance during the causative stages of his neurosis. Of the unaccountable remorse that tortures him, he says

"There may be growing such a flower as that
In the unsightly garden where I planted
Not knowing the seed or what was coming of it."

But curiosity is no substitute for knowledge.

"I've done much wondering if I planted it;
But our poor wander, when it comes too late,
Fights with a lath, and one that solid fast
Breaks while it yawns and looks another way
For a less negligible adversary". (p.p.551)

But 'There is knowing' and 'knowing'. The narrator says that Avon's wife 'knowing less than I knew, yet knew more'. (p.57))

At the conclusion of his story, all that Avon knows is that he hasn't attained any real degree of self-knowledge. Knowledge for him is awareness of his ignorance and an irrational belief that darkness rules the affairs of man. The excessive limitation of human knowledge is, no doubt, a plausible doctrine, but not when it emanates from a sick and disintegrating mind. Here are Avon's final words:

"Tomorrow I shall have another birthday

And with it there may come another message -

Although I cannot see the need of it,

Or much more need of drowning, if that's all

Men drown for - when they drown. You know as much

As I know about that, though I've a right,

If not a reason, to be on my guard.

And only God knows what good that will do.

Now you may get some air. Good night ! and thank you.
(p.572)

This is a final realization that his problem is psychiatric, that in truth there is no rational or objective reason for his downfall, and that he has not been able to fish the reason out of the dark well of his irrational mind. And underlying this is the daemonic, crude knowledge voiced from the unconscious ... 'I shall know where you are until you die'. Avon confessed, Robinson portrayed a neurotic mind. Like the doctor, we "fancy there was rather more than fear." (p.573) And Avon's Harvest bears witness to the Freudian axiom that "there are in the minds of men certain things which they know without knowing that they know them." 43

Knowledge, determined in part by temperament, is dependent

upon communication.

'Another man

Than Avon might have given to us at least

A futile opportunity for words

We might regret,' (p.593)

the narrator says. Is communication through verbal images futile? Robinson, like Freud, knew that words were not enough; they had to be accompanied by the expression of hidden thoughts and feelings through behaviour; and required that an 'inner change', a re-adjustment should take place. Avon's Harvest shows that words alone do not clarify and resolve an intense psychological problem and the dictionary on Avon's table is a symbol of their futility. The narrator looked at the dictionary

'like one asking

... why we make so much of words

That have so little weight in the true balance'. (p.545)

The narrator discerned that things were not as they should be, that there were 'unseeing presences'; and is resigned to the inaccessibility of the psychic reality:

'I found myself ashamed

Of a long staring at him, and as often

Essayed the dictionary on the table,

Wondering if in its interior

There was an uncompanionable word

To say just what was creeping in my hair.' (p.551)

Avon's inner self behaves 'for reasons not in Avon's dictionary!.

What is the uncompanionable truth about that inner self?

(iv)

The question leads us to the crux of the matter and the true enigma of Avon's Harvest : the identity of Avon's adversary. Who is he? we ask. And like Avon we must ask not only what is he? but also why is he? If his part in the tale was simply that of a real and independent character who implemented a successful campaign of persecution, there would be no difficulty in answering the questions and the last would be redundant anyway; but such is not the case. Instead, he is a strange and enigmatic being, and surely the strangest feature of the poem is the very one which has been so remarkably ignored, viz. his physical unreality. It is impossible to accept him as a real, flesh-and-blood person. In no wise does his portrait adhere to the customary essentials of characterisation. He has no name and is referred to as "he", "this fellow", and even "it"; he is not realised through conversation or independent action; there is virtually no realistic or naturalistic description of him; and there is no measure of real-life, everyday detail sufficient to furnish him with human reality. Far less is conveyed about the narrator, Avon's wife, Asher, and the doctor, yet they are acceptable as real personages whereas this far more important figure is not. It is probable, then, that the above mentioned omissions in characterisation are deliberate. The poet, it seems, had no desire to give the fellow any more objective reality than that of a dream-figure; he was intended as a product of Avon's unconscious mind. In this light Avon's bewildering, bizarre, unnatural, metaphysical, eccentric descriptions

of his adversary make sense, for he is portrayed as such a figure created in the mind and projected merely on to the memory of an actual person once known. Thus, Avon's descriptions never seem to be about a real human being. The first time Avon describes "the fellow" to the narrator he strikes the dominant symbolic note and it is hardly more unrealistic than the other descriptions which follow:

"you need not ask

What undulating reptile he was like

For such a worm as I discerned in him

Was never yet on earth or in the ocean,

Or anywhere else than in my sense of him.

Had all I made of him been tangible

The Lord must have intended long ago

Some private and unspeakable new monster

Equipped for such a thing's extermination." (pp.549-50)

This is demented talk about a private monster, and Avon's neuroticism cannot escape immediate surface detection in this and subsequent descriptions, for a balanced person would not describe another - not even his worst enemy - in the way Avon does. Avon is unaware of his startling admissions in the above passage. The determining factor of the other's reality is Avon's 'sense of him', a sense vitally limited by the very intangibility which results from the ignorance of consciousness in matters of the unconscious. Avon's descriptions of his enemy are plainly unhealthy, even taking into account Avon's belief that a more evil and unhealthy person couldn't be imagined, and point to the daemonic forces raging

below consciousness. He describes him in terms of Nemesis, 'an incubus at large', and an 'evil genius'. Avon is obsessed by his unreality:

"there was a vicious twist

On his amphibious face that might have been

On anything else a smile - rather like one

We look for on the stage than in the street". (p.561)

His world is a stage, the stage of Avon's mind. In truly obsessional language Avon describes him as arrogant, diabolically skilful, cunning, cringing, insidious, swarthy, poisonous, self-pitying, indolent, malignant, reptilean, ophidian, amorphous etc. - characteristics which agree only too well with psychoanalytical accounts of the primitive and instinctual aspect of the Unconscious. Avon says ironically, "even to dream it would have been absurd." One remarkable passage contains the following impressions:

"... the fellow's indolence

And his malignant oily swarthinness

Housing a reptile blood that I could see

Beneath it, like hereditary venom

Out of old human swamps ...

Often I'd find him strewn along my couch

Like an amorphous lizard with its clothes on,

Reading a book and waiting for its dinner." (pp.552-53)

Superimposed on the organic model is the flesh of irrationality. Such a figure becomes the product of Avon's unconscious where forces such as hate, fear, remorse, pity, terror, evil etc. are in undisputed supremacy. Imagination, indeed bodies forth the forms of things unknown.

The reality of Avon's enemy, then, is psychical; he exists as a psychic force and possesses libidinous energies; his world is Avon's mind, the irrational side, and the story of Avon's disintegrating personality is the story of the enemy within forcing Avon to accept the irrational world as the only reality. The objectivisation of the unconscious material is achieved through the technique of projection. The real person has ceased to exist for Avon, and all the reader sees of him is what Avon sees : an illusion of the actual person, an embodiment of phantasy. This is the dynamic, central factor in Avon's neurosis and its primacy is emphatic in the poem because Robinson obeyed the laws of psychical reality, instead of naturalistic reality, in his portrait of Avon's enemy. "In contrast to material reality" the man possesses "psychical reality", so that, in these words of Freud, "we gradually come to understand that in the world of neurosis PSYCHICAL REALITY is the determining factor."⁴⁴ The 'psychical' is a delusion of the 'material' which in neurotic cases reaches overriding and chronic proportions : such is Avon's sighting of his enemy in Rome. The scene is set in a remarkably well projected and symbolised Unconscious:

"I must have been a yard away from him
 Yet as we passed I felt the touch of him
 Like that of something soft in a dark room,
 There's hardly need of saying that we said nothing,
 Or that we gave each other an occasion
 For more than our eyes uttered. He was gone
 Before I knew it, like a solid phantom;

And his reality was for me some time
 In its achievement - given that one's to be
 Convinced that such an incubus at large
 Was ever quite real." (p.561)

The "inaccessibility" of Avon's delusions "to logic and to actual experience is to be explained ... by the connection they bear to the unconscious material which is both expressed by, and held in check by, the delusion."⁴⁵ Hate is one such binding material in Avon's psychology:

"The carriage rolled away with him inside,
 Leaving the two of us alive together
 In the same hemisphere to hate each other." (p.557)

This and other statements make it clear that the conflict between Avon and his adversary belonged to the psychic, not the material, reality. Avon's feeling of inseparability is thus accounted for. This has been previously noted when it was established that the other fellow was always with Avon as a psychical presence, and when the contradictions between the two realities were analysed. Avon said that his enemy was not wholly out of any place that he was in thereafter; that it was his doom to see him, be where he might; and that he was never rid of him. Yet in twenty years Avon reported seeing him in the flesh only twice (apart from the hallucination), and both occasions - Rome and London - are clearly dominated by the psychical vision. After the experience in Rome Avon confessed he was "never again to move without him at my elbow or behind me". (p.561)

When it is remembered, therefore, that most of what Avon says has psychological and not material significance, the parts begin

to fit into their assigned places. Avon spoke truly when he said "there we were ... we two together Breathing one air" (p.549) and when he confessed he was never alone, for the part of himself disguised as another form must always be with him ("a blot between me and my life", p.570), however blurred and dark it may seem. Hence he tells the narrator early in the poem:

"I shall not be alone with you to listen;

And I should be far less alone tonight

With you away, make what you will of that", (p.552)

and the paradox is psychologically sound, being based on the contrast between 'psychical' and 'material'. Nor, accordingly, was Avon alone in the hallucination scene:

"I was there alone -

Alone for the first time since I was born;

And I was not alone. That's what it is

To be in hell." (p.566)

Hell is the state of mind induced by a splintered psyche. There emerged from the inner darkness of his mind, as combatants against the ego, the splintered 'presences' which finally coagulated into the projected version of his enemy. It is impossible for a self to be 'alone' when it is so divided. "I was not alone" his ego repeatedly announces, and this is a recognition of the psychical truth.

Psychologically, therefore, the other person's words 'I shall know where you are until you die' are similarly explicable as an emanation from this second splintered psyche. Psychically, of course, they are inexpugnable: Avon says, "I have heard them ever since". Their materialisation on the card signals the

encroachment of the 'psychical' over the 'material'. The annual card signifies the other fellow's psychic inseparability; representing a part of Avon's instinctual self, he was therefore born with him and must come back to die with him. Avon was able to lock material doors, but the key of repression eventually failed to fit the psychic lock. Hence Avon's prognostic utterance:

"I shall see him

Larger, sometime, than I shall see the face

Of whosoever watches by the bed

On which I die - given I die that way." (p.556)

But Avon didn't die that way, and his enemy - not a material agent because Avon locked the door from the inside - was with him and died with him. The doctor concludes Avon's Harvest with the following words:

"The door was locked inside - they broke it in

To find him - but she heard him when it came.

There are no signs of any visitors,

Or need of them. If I were not a child

Of science, I should say it was the devil.

I don't believe it was another woman,

And surely it was not another man." (p.573)

Avon's vision of the world is distorted by this other figure who seems to have employed his malevolent energy to reorientate everything that Avon sees or knows; he becomes Avon's most crucial frame of reference and this factor heralds the psychotic victory. In a most significant admission Avon declares that it is the psychical, not the material, man who obsesses him. He says "My shadow of

him, wherever I found myself, Might horribly as well have been the man -" (p.561) and then compares the person to a "large worm".

He proceeds:

"And so he was,

In fact; yet as I go on to grow older,

I question if there's anywhere a fact

That isn't the malevolent existence

Of one man who is dead, or is not dead,

Or what the devil it is that he may be.

There must be, I suppose, a fact somewhere,

But I don't know it." (pp.561-2)

That fact, as we have seen, is psychological and a result of Avon's morbid condition. Repression does not succeed in keeping the enemy dead (that is, unconscious) all the time.

In Jung's analytical psychology the complex is said to be a most important road to the unconscious and is, therefore, closely connected with neurosis. 'Complexes' are described as indicators of dissociability of the psyche and can become autonomous by forming themselves out of unconscious material. An autonomous complex is said to carry on a separate existence, becoming as it were a miniature and self-contained psyche in the big psyche. This, theoretically, is similar to what we have described as happening to Avon's personality: his enemy was the symbolic figure-head and nodal point of the dynamic process, and the complex attained figurative and independent existence via 'projection'. The projection represents the attempt of a future personality to break through, which is quite often the ultimate aim of a

powerful complex. All this is not only clinically feasible, but probably provided the intuitive basis of an important experiment by the poet, in the development of his psychological technique. 'Projection', on his own admission, formed the basis of a later poem Cavender's House. That it provides the key to the identity of Avon's enemy can be inferred from the following technical explanations:

"Since the autonomous complexes are by nature unconscious, they seem - like all manifestations of the unconscious - not to belong to the ego, i.e. to be qualities of outside objects or persons, in other words, projections." 46

And:

"Since unconscious contents are experienced only in projected form, the unconscious complex appears first in projection as an attribute of an outward object or person. If the unconscious complex is so markedly "split off" as to take on the character of an entity (often of a menacing nature) assailing the individual from outside, or if it appears as an attribute of an object of outward reality, such symptoms occur as may be observed in persecution mania, paranoia, etc. This object may either belong to the actual outside world, or it may stem from within, from the psyche. Such "objects" may take the form of spirits, sounds, animals, figures, etc." 47

Avon's projection is the image of his enemy, although the other characteristics are also evident, especially in the

hallucination scene. The horrific climax is achieved largely as a result of the power of projected entities; thus horror is at the same time a valid study in psychology. The 'entity' is indeed 'of a menacing nature'; Avon saw his antagonist come like a beast of prey;

"His eyes now, as they were, for the first time -
Aflame as they had never been before
With all their gathered vengeance gleaming in them,"
and 'caught':

"The shadowy glimpse of an uplifted arm,
And a moon-flash of metal." (p.571)

The projection, as we have seen, is directed outward upon a human form derived largely "from within, from the psyche". It is also manifested as 'objects' in the initial stage of the hallucination, and they are undoubtedly akin to the above-mentioned "spirits, sounds, animals, figures etc." The main stages in the projection of these entities are described by Avon in the following passages/

- (1) "suddenly, like faces over the lake,
Out of the silence of that other shore
I was aware of hidden presences
That soon, no matter how many of them there were,
Would all be one. I could not look behind me,
Where I could hear that one of them was breathing,
For, if I did, those others over there
Might all see that at last I was afraid;
And I might hear them without seeing them,
Seeing that other one." (p.565)

(2) "I was afraid, this time, but not of man -
 Or man as you may figure him ...
 It was not anything my eyes had seen
 That I could feel around me in the night,
 There by that lake." (p.567)

(3) "Interminably
 The minutes crawled along and over me,
 Slow, cold, intangible, and invisible,
 As if they had come up out of that water;" (pp.567-68)

(4) "Some force that was not mine opened my eyes," (p.569)

(5) "he squeezed
 His unclear outlines into the dim room,
 And half erect inside, like a still beast
 With a face partly man's, came slowly on." (p.570)

(6) "I could not feel his breath but I could hear it;
 Though fear had made an anvil of my heart
 Where demons, for the joy of doing it,
 Were sledging death down on it." (p.571)

The poet deliberately focuses these experiences upon the traumatic past which provided the material out of which these nightmarish projections are created and from which he is powerless to escape.

"I was immovable", Avon remembers, -

"and a dead sweat
 Rolled out of me as I remembered him
 When I had seen him leaving me at school.
 'I shall know where you are until you die',

Were the last words that I had heard him say;
 And there he was. Now I could see his face,
 And all the sad, malignant desperation
 That was drawn on it after I had struck him,
 And on my memory since that afternoon." (p.570)

What is the significance of this powerful and morbid memory?

Avon's trouble was precipitated by a not uncommon experience among boys at school, the exclusive and potentially homosexual attachment of one boy for another. Avon was evidently singled out as the object of such an attachment. "This fellow had no friend", Avon says, and "no apparent need of one, Save always and alone myself." His "heart and eyes" were "fixed" on Avon "insufferably" and "Invincibly". He concentrated his insidious designs upon Avon's revulsion, realising that Avon was prone to that "unfamiliar" (that is, abnormal) "subtle sort of pity" which may be the means by which unhealthy intimacies are established. Avon says:

"He lavished his whole altered arrogance
 On me; and with an overweening skill,
 Which had sometimes almost a cringing in it,
 Found a few flaws in my tight mail of hate
 And slowly pricked a poison into me
 In which at first I failed at recognising
 An unfamiliar subtle sort of pity." (p.552)

The boy engaged a certain amount of Avon's complicity in which "pity" (a substitute, perhaps, for a more 'uncompanionable word') allied with "tolerance" provided the rationale for emotional release, the true nature of which Avon was slow to realise. The "tolerance" that "Assumed a blind ascendancy of custom" is an astute observation

of the evolvment of sordid passion unguided by reason. The following significant passage personifies perversion and records Avon's struggling resistance against it and his horror of being dependent upon it:

"Pity, or something like it,
 Was in the poison of his proximity;
 For nothing else that I have any name for
 Could have invaded and so mastered me
 With a slow tolerance that eventually
 Assumed a blind ascendancy of custom
 That saw not even itself. When I came in,
 Often I'd find him strewn along my couch
 Like an amorphous lizard with its clothes on,
 Reading a book and waiting for its dinner.
 His clothes were always odiously in order,
 Yet I should not have thought of him as clean -
 Not even if he had washed himself to death
 Proving it. There was nothing right about him.
 Then he would search, never quite satisfied,
 Though always in a measure confident,
 My eyes to find a welcome waiting in them,
 Unwilling, as I see him now, to know
 That it would never be there. Looking back,
 I am not sure that he would not have died
 For me, if I were drowning or on fire,
 Or that I would not ~~have~~ rather have let myself
 Die twice than owe the debt of my survival

To him, though he had lost not even his clothes.

No, there was nothing right about that fellow;

And after twenty years to think of him

I should be quite as helpless now to serve him

As I was then. I mean - without my story." (p.553)

"There was nothing right about him" has moral and psychological connotations suggestive of abnormality, and these are strongly reinforced by descriptions of the fellow's malignant and animal nature and by references to his uncleanness. There is a strong odour of indecency about the relationship, and an unconscious admission by Avon of loss of decency. Until the other boy came to the school Avon was one of many of "decent youth" free from any wounding "malevolence"; Asher is extolled as one who contributes to 'the world's decency', but he leaves and the bestial, indecent form of Avon's adversary arrives. No amount of washing could bring cleanliness to the other boy; Avon felt guilty^{if} encircled by the stain and proximity of the boy's influence and he could not wash himself free of the affair.

"Oh, the whole thing was bad -

So bad that even the bleaching suns and rains

Of years that wash away to faded lines,

Or blot out wholly, the sharp wrongs and ills

Of youth, have had not cleansing agent in them

To dim the picture." (p.556)

Avon felt 'bad' because he felt moral guilt, and this is sustained by moral and pathognomic considerations referred to as "the wrongs and ills Of youth". The "lie that stained" Avon's friend, on the

contrary, was purely superficial, "a false blot that a few days washed off." (p.555) It was an excuse for provocation, for Avon was not concerned so much with another "boy's honor" as his own feeling of despicable dishonor. Guilt and "accumulated hate" provoked in Avon the aggression that brought an end to the relationship.

"All I remember is a bursting flood
Of half a year's accumulated hate,
And his incredulous eyes before I struck him.
He had gone once too far; and when he knew it,
He knew it was all over; and I struck him." (p.555)

The physical basis of the relationship was thus replaced by psychical elements which could not be curtailed in any physical way save death.

The suggestions in what Avon says about his thoughts and feelings are unhealthy and his revulsion is morbid. In the above long passage (C.P. p.553) he makes rather obsessive remarks concerning the other fellow's 'clothes'. If these references are considered in the symbolic, Freudian sense - unconscious allusion to the body and nakedness - such meaning is in no way discordant with the total impression. Moreover, Avon later says that the "Maine woods" were "a voyage away from anything wearing clothes" (p.564). And during the hallucination in which his unconscious had reared up against him and taken possession of his faculties, Avon obeyed his "shadow" and, as he says, fell upon the bed "with all my clothes on" and "lay and waited." (p.569)

But one feels that the trauma - producing situation could have been dealt with in a normal way with discretion, expediency, and honor; yet Avon was unable to accomplish this. The result

of the experience was the life-long formation of a neurotic aversion. Avon's idea of the cause is superficial; he says the aversion is the consequence of the other boy's need of him, but complains that it was "chance" - not his own disposition - which "fettered me and my aversion To his unprofitable need of me". (p.557) It seems that Avon's complicit role was a result of weakness and perhaps subservience, and even assuming that in his case reluctance and revulsion were preventatives against homosexual complicity, the predisposition was at least unconsciously powerful enough to establish a ^{neurotic} fear of such complicity. The essential point is that Avon did not feel blameless, nor did he tell all. His violent feelings of humiliation, hate, remorse, shame, loathing, etc. are characteristic products of guilt-feeling and conscience. Ideationally, at least, Avon succumbed to perversion and his struggle against it accords with Freud's analysis of typical reactions in Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex. Freud stated in this early work that "In all neurotics we find without exception in the unconscious psychic life feelings of inversion and fixation of libido on persons of the same sex." ⁴⁸ The neurosis is the negative of the perversion and is often substituted for it. This, broadly speaking, happens to Avon whose psychic counterforces, "feelings of reaction", "built up psychic dams of disgust, shame and morality." ⁴⁹ Abhorrence of perversion "yields to a distinct feeling of loathing" ⁵⁰ and this loathing has been previously noted in Avon's descriptions of the other person; he is loathed as the apostle of disease and evil. Avon is tortured by the characteristic reaction of shame:

"If you had seen his eyes
 As I did, and if you had seen his face
 At work as I did, you might understand.
 I was ashamed of it, as I am now,
 But that's the prelude to another theme."

It is indeed the prelude to another theme, as we have already seen and it involves shame and fear with which Avon is unable to cope.

This other 'theme' is the mainspring of Avon's extreme anxiety and expresses itself in the hallucinatory symbols of the episode at the Maine retreat. The symptoms of shame and loathing are contorted and intense. Of these symptoms, Freud says that they "represent the converted expression of impulses which in a broader sense might be designated as perverse if they could manifest themselves directly in phantasies and acts without deviation from consciousness."⁵¹ And in the hallucination scene the re-conversion does take place; Avon is paralysed with fear and his symptomatic protection is of no avail against the guilty and degenerate monster of perverse desire. The climax of the hallucination is the diabolically perverse apotheosis of seduction conveyed in the narcissistic imagery of autoeroticism. Hence, the erotic significance of "nature's" "defection",^{to} which Avon previously referred (p.568), is now seen to manifest itself in the instinctual bestiality of man;

"all there was left for me to do
 Was to lie there and see him while he squeezed
 His unclean outlines into the dim room,
 And half erect inside, like a still beast

With a face partly man's, come slowly on
 Along the floor to the bed where I lay,
 And waited ...

I began to fancy there was on me
 The stupor that explorers have alleged
 As evidence of nature's final mercy

When tigers have them down upon the earth." (pp.570-71)

Avon "had seen his eyes and felt his breath". The "black tiger" that had earlier waited for Avon in fancy, the monster of hidden desire which Avon, from a conscious viewpoint, could honestly deny having ever "summoned ... Or thought of" (p.548), is the symbol of his defection. And Avon's defection is itself a symbol of man's defection against Nature, against the primal unity of the instincts. But Robinson was unable to express the optimistic creed of the Romantics whereby a final harmony with Nature is achieved.

At this stage, then, the neurotic pattern is discernible, having swung full cycle back to the chaos of the original situation, back to the 'black tiger'. During the cycle and apart from the disturbances which occurred, tension had been maintained between repressed (homosexual impulses) and repressing factors and produced a constant series of new symptom-formations. These latter ranged from 'pity', 'wonder', 'humiliation', 'aggression', 'hate', 'remorse', deluded hope to the final domination of anxiety and 'fear'; and "what is feared, the object of the anxiety, [in this case the apparition of Avon's enemy] is always the emergence of a traumatic factor." ⁵² The series of symptomatic changes are not shapeless and exhibit a regressive pattern which Freud designated as the

slow return of the repressed. Avon's mental history during the twenty years is a history of the slow return of the repressed. In Totem and Taboo Freud describes the neurotic pattern in terms which seem to apply well to Avon's case. He writes:

"In the neuroses there are distinctly acts of compromise which on the one hand may be regarded as proofs of remorse and efforts to expiate and similar actions; but on the other hand they are at the same time substitutive actions which recompense the impulse for what has been forbidden. It is a law of neurotic diseases that these obsessive acts serve the impulse more and more and come nearer and nearer to the original and forbidden act." 53

Hate fought remorse and fear was created, because of the 'forbidden act' whereby Avon was damned; his Puritan conscience declares:

"Beware of hate, remorse, and fear,

And listen. You are staring at the damned ..." (p.566)

Understandably, Avon is forced to feel the impotency of 'acts of compromise' under the stress of the returning, forbidden act :

"It was not anything my eyes had seen
That I could feel around me in the night,
There by the lake. If I had been alone,
There would have been the joy of being free
Which in imagination I had won
With unimaginable expiation -

But I was not alone." (p.567)

And, of course, "the original and forbidden act" is the dramatic

content of Avon's hallucination. Avon is a prisoner of his past unfreed from his burden.

The remorse Avon feels is an expression of his unconscious sense of guilt, a revulsion against the forbidden act. Even though he "has repressed his evil desires into his Unconscious and would then gladly say to himself that he is no longer answerable for them, he is yet compelled to feel his responsibility in the form of a sense of guilt for which he can discern no foundation." ⁵⁴ Avon conjecturing ^{over} that he is tormented because of personal sins, or of ancestral debts he has to pay : he sees his guilt as fated. And to this extent the burden, as it was for Job and Prometheus, is out of all proportion to the personal expiation and personal guilt. In this light, Avon is, as Cestre suggests, a symbol of modern man as heir to the crime-ridden past, and the plight of Avon is the plight of modern man outlined by Freud in the conclusion of Civilization and Its Discontents:

"If civilization is an inevitable course of development from the group of the family to the group of humanity as a whole, then an intensification of the sense of guilt... will be inextricably bound up with it, until perhaps the sense of guilt may swell to a magnitude that individuals can hardly support." ⁵⁵

Avon's adversary was spawned "Out of human swamps" and instinctual guilt; he attached himself to Avon invincibly "in a sort of Nemesis-like way." That Avon should so dramatise his situation suggests that he feels, morbidly, 'an intensification of the sense of guilt.'

Avon's sense of guilt is not unconnected with death and his inability to affirm life. His one aggressive act intensified the remorse and fear of further aggression thus creating an attitude of mind which served to dam the hatred and invoke it, in projected form, against himself. Aggression and hatred turned inward, if sufficiently powerful, is a slow form of dying, and in Avon's case this introjected death is stimulated by feelings of guilt, failure, hopelessness and inevitability. The projected figure of his enemy threatens annihilation with sufficient authority to bring Avon to the verge of death and madness; the uplifted arm represents the masochistic action of Avon striking at himself. Has not the narrator announced at the beginning that only the fire of death can quench the fire of fear in Avon's soul? Avon may desire the death of his enemy, entertain visions of "Some private and unspeakable new monster Equipped for such a thing's extermination" (p.550), celebrate, by way of a drink, the other fellow's reported drowning; but each is a vain evasion, the futile action of striking at himself. He cannot exterminate that which is part of him, nor can he escape it, not even if he was the last man left alive after God's "extinction of the rest." (p.567) He cannot accept the reality of his own nature, nor can he owe the debt of his survival to the creature spawned in that reality. (p.553)

In the hallucination death seemed unsupportable: it was on his breast and he felt the touch of it (p.568); he sank into his bed "Like a man getting into his own grave" (p.569); demons were joyfully sledging death down on his heart. (p.571) Yet what he fears most is not the act of dying (this is symptomatic rather) but the base and perverted impulses of living ...

"my fear was not the fear of dying", he says (p.565).

Nevertheless, he is dying and death is an associate of his extreme anxiety. He debates the issue and once more attempts to deny the responsibility of self; he tells the narrator:

"You are staring at the damned

But yet you are no more the one than he

To say that it was he alone who planted

The flower of death now growing in his garden." (p.566)

As the flower is psychical, not biological, death, who but Avon could have planted it? The cause of death, as the physician explains, related to a state of anxiety (fear) powerful enough to induce the "nightmare and an aneurism" (p.573). Before his body ceased to function, Avon's ego suffered the overthrow it feared; what his ego feared and felt in the anxiety of hallucination was, to use Freud's words, "in the nature of an overthrow or an extinction." Avon's fear is connected with instinctual death in the way, perhaps, which Brown suggests:

"It looks as if the specifically human capacity for anxiety does reflect a revolt against death and individuality, or at least some deep disturbance in the organic unity of life and death." 57

The analysis of Avon's disintegration may be directed now along two lines of enquiry : firstly, what are the general and specific psychological characteristics of his disease? and secondly, what psychological symbolism is involved in the process of disintegration?

The dynamic relation between and within the unconscious

and consciousness is one of conflict. The essence of neurosis is mental conflict and this characteristic is evident in Avon's instance. Freud remarks in the Introductory Lectures that: "One side of the personality stands for certain wishes, while another part struggles against them and fends them off. There is no neurosis without such a CONFLICT." The conflict in Avon's neurosis is, of course, represented in the struggle between Avon and his enemy. It is derived basically from an instinctual level and it is this fact which determines the futility of Avon's unrealistic rationalisations. "I'm at odds With conscience" Avon says; and he is. But his revulsion is an insufficient weapon against the repressed homosexual tendencies because of the damaging amount of fear which is accordingly released. His fear, as Freud would say, corresponds to the former wish now repressed; and Avon fights a losing battle in his inability to dissipate it. The instinctual nature of the conflict is revealed in terms of the hate that fought remorse, while it must be remembered that each side has its constellatory emotions as combatants. The conflict became formative while Avon was at school. He records it thus:

"There was a battle going on within me
Of hate that fought remorse - if you must have it -
Never to win, .. never to win but once,
And having won, to lose disastrously,
And as it was to prove, interminably -
Or till an end of living may annul." (p.554)

It was a losing battle for the potentially stable personality,

the interminability of which could only be annulled by death. Anxiety is the nodal point of neurotic conflict. The anxiety in Avon's case has already been explained in relation to Robinson's term 'fear' which is employed frequently by Avon and the narrator. Avon treats the internal danger as an external one in the typical manner of the anxiety state: "in neurotic anxiety ... the ego is attempting a flight, from the demands of the libido, and is treating this internal danger as if it were an external one."⁵⁹ The anxiety is bound by symptoms but when the neurosis is most acute these are heightened and finally displaced by the anxiety. This happens to Avon in the hallucination scene and, presumably, immediately prior to his death. On the former occasion he reiterates his feeling of fear and terror and it is this that paralyzes him and induces

"a sort of conscious, frozen catalepsy
Wherein a man sees all there is around him
As if it were not real, and he were not
Alive." (p.569)

The nature of Avon's fear, then, is hardly an exception to the rule that "The neurotic individual fears nothing so much as encounter with his inward and outward reality."⁶⁰ Certain features of Avon's personality - his indeterminateness, indecisiveness, loss of energy, curtailment of freedom, frustration, excessive worry and brooding, intellectual doubts, and his absorption in retrospections - are typical characteristics of the neurotic state. A particular quality of his illness appears in his susceptibility to the paranoid manner of negation. Once

it is realised that Avon's real enemy is a psychic agent, it follows that he is a not unusual victim of the delusion of persecution. This is confirmed diagnostically in relation to Avon's repression, for it has been concluded that "persecutory paranoia" is the means by which a person defends himself against a homosexual impulse which has become too powerful." 61

It is not difficult to point to certain paranoid patterns of behaviour which Avon was heir to. The following are conspicuous examples: the three occasions when Avon locks the door of his room in fear of his enemy - when narrating his story to his friend, later that evening, and the occasion in the Maine cabin; Avon's plea to the narrator to see if anyone was in the street; and such verbal admissions as "never again to move without him at my elbow or behind me" (p.564) and "I could not look behind me" (p.565).

The Maine setting is psychical rather than physical; the dramatic personae are dynamic aspects of the mental personality; and the action consists of a battle between rational and emotional factors. Avon says he is in 'hell' and we know this to be a justified expression because the projection of unconscious landscape and 'inascape' is of a decidedly hellish nature. Hell is after all a mythical representation of an unconscious state; 62 the "censored wishes seem to rise up from a veritable hell." The experience is accordingly archetypal. Avon felt the demand to return to the beginning, knowing that he must have a final answer: "Before the dawn", he reasoned, "there will be a difference here." In the words of a Jungian interpreter:

"Once the psyche reaches the midpoint of life, the process of development demands a return to the beginning, a descent into the dark, hot depths of the unconscious. To sojourn in these depths, to withstand their dangers, is a journey to hell and "death". But he who comes through safe and sound, who is "reborn", will return full of knowledge and wisdom, equipped for the outward and inward demands of life. He has pressed forward to his limits and has taken his destiny upon himself." 63 Avon experiences the descent but not the spiritual re-awakening:

"I was there alone -

Alone for the first time since I was born ;

And I was not alone. That's what it is

To be in hell ...

All through the slow, long, desolating twilight

Of incoherent certainties, I waited; ...

And while the night grew down upon me there,

I thought of old Prometheus in the story

That I had read at school, and saw mankind

All muddled into clusters in the dark,

Calling to God for light. There was a light

Coming for them, but there was none for me.." (p.566)

Robinson's outlook concerning this process of individuation is generally more realistically Freudian; the achievement of rebirth for Cavender and Matthias, for example, was no simple matter; for Avon it is an impossibility. His was a re-birth of hate as ... Avon lives in two worlds of hell, a primordial hell

and a personal, existential hell. The former is symbolised by the 'primeval lake' as well as the ophidian and archetypally Satanic characteristics of Avon's projection, and the latter by Avon's Harvest of 'three diseases' - "hate, remorse, and fear." The lake is the womb of birth and death; its 'water' is accordingly 'relentless' and 'had the stillness of the end of things ... on it'. (p.557) The dramatis personae may be rationalised in terms of psychological symbolism by reference to Freudian metaphors: Avon's enemy emerges from the instinctual reservoir of the ID, whilst Avon signifies the remnant endeavour of the weakened EGO to escape overthrow and extinction at the hands of this all-powerful visitant. The manifestations of the id seem alien, for neurosis is "a thing which has set itself up against the ego as an element alien to it."⁶⁴ The psychology of this situation is by no means radical - this is a traditional drama - although Robinson's rendering of it is not without novelty. Freud's inevitable admission that "In popular language, we may say that the ego stands for reason and circumspection, while the id stands for the untamed passions"⁶⁵ is reactionary enough to suit his and literature's severe and conservative critics. Freud's description of the primitive and irrational nature of the unconscious, as well as his imagistic impressions of the id, tend to agree fundamentally with Avon's portrait of his enemy. Freud says of the id:

"It is the obscure inaccessible part of our personality ...

We came nearer to the id with images, and call it a chaos,

a cauldron of seething excitement."⁶⁶

Thus it is that Avon depicts his enemy, not as a person but as a process highly emotive and instinctual in nature. Freud derived the name 'id' from the impersonal pronoun. He says "This impersonal pronoun seems particularly suited to express the essential character of this province of the mind - the character of being foreign to the ego."⁶⁷ In Maine, Avon's enemy emerges from the unconscious waters of the 'primeval lake' and his hallucinatory image is first recognised by Avon as the id - the impersonal pronoun. Avon says:

"Some force that was not mine opened my eyes

And, as I knew it must be, - it was there". (p.569)

Although the conflict between id and ego is the predominant cause of anxiety, there are two other contributing factors, REALITY and that ~~exhibitor~~^{inhibitor} of conscience, the SUPER-EGO. Indeed, the psychic brunt which Avon is forced to bear makes life most difficult:

"... goaded on by the id, hemmed in by the super-ego, and rebuffed by reality, the ego struggles to cope with its economic task of reducing the forces and influences which work in it and upon it to some kind of harmony; and we may well understand how it is that we so often cannot repress the cry: 'Life is not easy'. When the ego is forced to acknowledge its weakness, it breaks out into anxiety: reality anxiety in face of the external world, moral anxiety in face of the super-ego, and neurotic anxiety in face of the strength of the passions of the id." 68

For Avon unreality supplants reality, the ego is overthrown, and, "at odds With conscience" and punished with remorse, he succumbs to morbid and hysterical speculations, and finally delusions, concerning the immaterial. He suffers a moral conflict as a result of his inability to affirm the whole of his nature. He shares bitterly the experience that "my conscience punishes me with painful reproaches, and makes me feel remorse." 69

The animality of Avon's enemy has already been alluded to as a characteristic of unconscious contents, and it is one which has been universally remarked upon in psychology.

"Unconsciousness has an animal nature", declares Jung. 70

Describing dream symbolism, Freud affirms the interpretation that "Wild Animals denote human beings whose senses are excited, and, hence, evil impulses or passions," 71 while a Jungian interpreter expresses the same view:

"Certain psychic character traits may be symbolised by animals and their behaviour, by objects, natural phenomena, and all sorts of things, and these in turn may find their correspondences in psychic qualities." 72

Robinson employs this knowledge, and draws upon the 'archaic heritages' of mental imagery, to telling effect. Avon describes his adversary as: "poisonous" "reptile", "amorphous lizard", "creature", "monster", "beast" etc. and refers unmistakably to qualities Freud ascribes to the id when he says "He had no soul". Avon was to remember that last occasion at school:

"I met his look, and on his face I saw

There was a twisting in the swarthiness

That I had often sworn to be the cast

Of his ophidian mind. He had no soul". (p.557)

Thus the regressive phantasy in which the id overpowers the ego takes the form of phylogenetic possession, which is, of course, related to paranoia and perversion. The degrading animality of Avon's adversary serves the poetry well in associating horror and perversion; for perversions "depart from the normal ... in a disregard for the barriers of species (the gulf between man and beast)." ⁷³

It is not surprising, then, that the moral aspect of Avon's conflict is expressed in primordial and archetypal terms which have supernatural significance. In Avon's mind the projection flows without difficulty from one symbolic value to another, from perversion to evil. The primitive aspects of mind predominate under regressive forces. Avon degenerates to a primitive state of mind and to such a mind "a man who is seized by strong emotions is possessed by a devil or a spirit." ⁷⁴ Avon's suffering has a Faustian quality about it, but his devil, shadow, spirit, is victorious. Jung writes:

"The character that summarizes a person's uncontrolled emotional manifestations consists, in the first place, of his inferior qualities or peculiarities... When people are not at their best, such flaws become clearly visible. I have called the inferior and less commendable part of a person the shadow. We have met with this figure in literature; for instance, Faust and his shadow Mephistopheles." ⁷⁵

Avon said, recalling the "phantom" and "incubus" of his enemy as he had seen it in Rome, that

"My shadow of him, wherever I found myself,

Might horribly as well have been the man". (p.561)

And, referring to the hallucinations, he says:

"I should hardly have confessed

The heritage then of my identity

To my own shadow; for I was powerless there,

As I am here." (p.566)

"... the fire was dead,

And all the life there was in the shadow

It made of me. My shadow was all of me;

The rest had had its day, and there was night

Remaining - only night, that's made for shadows,

Shadows and sleep and dreams, or dreams without it." (p.568)

"I must obey my shadow." (p.569)

And this shadow is obliterated in the darkness of evil, an evil projected from within upon the traditional image of the Anti-Christ thus forming one more raiment of phantasy in which Avon's enemy was clothed. The "black tiger" sprang at Avon's throat and brought him down. It savoured the hell of his heart and found it a dark place.

NOTES

- 1 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.102.
- 2 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.p. 142-43.
- 3 Ibid, 143-44.
- 4 Dauner, Louise, "Avon and Cavender : Two Children of the Night", American Literature, XIV (March, 1942), 58.
- 5 Ibid, p.p. 59-60.
- 6 Ibid, p.60.
- 7 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.p.102-3.
- 8 Edwin Arlington Robinson and His Manuscripts, p.28.
- 9 Van Doren, Mark, Edwin Arlington Robinson (Garden City, N.Y., The Literary Guild, 1927) 59.
- 10 Edwin Arlington Robinson. p.300.
- 11 Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.286.
- 12 Untriangulated Stars, p.127.
- 13 Introductory Lectures, p.68.
- 14 Untriangulated Stars, p.135.
- 15 Ibid, p.116.
- 16 "Edwin Arlington Robinson", Bookman Vol. LXXV, No. 7 (Nov. 1932), 677.
- 17 Untriangulated Stars, p.135.
- 18 Selected Letters, p.127.
- 19 Ibid, pp. 93-94.
- 20 p. 382.
- 21 Untriangulated Stars, p.134.
- 22 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.300.
- 23 Ibid, p.156.
- 24 "Psychologist of New England", p. 4.

- 25 p.p.382-83.
- 26 Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.100.
- 27 Brown, David, "A Note on Avon's Harvest",
American Literature, IX (Nov. 1937) 347.
- 28 Apart from the evidence Brown presents, the
likelihood of this explanation may be considered
to be strengthened when one remembers that Robinson
felt a profound admiration for Geste whose interpretations
he held in high regard. The poet once told a friend,
"That Frenchman knows what I am up to. And somehow
he always has." (R.W.Brown, Next Door to a Poet, p.25).
- 29 "A Note on Avon's Harvest", p.343.
- 30 Ibid, p.345.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson to Howard George
Schmitt, ed. Carl J. Weber (Waterville, Maine, Colby
College Library, 1943), 27. (Letter dated June 29, 1934).
- 33 "A Note on Avon's Harvest", p.346.
- 34 Ibid, p.347.
- 35 Ibid, p.348.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Italics mine - S.C.H. The following references to time
are italicised.
- 38 Two other references corroborate this - see C.P.
p.p. 550,553.
- 39 Untriangulated Stars, p.XXVI
- 40 Hera, jealous because Zeus fell in love with Io, set a
gadfly to sting Io and chase her all over the world. It
was variously believed that the insect stung her to death
or that she died of grief and shame.
- 41 Introductory Lectures, p.p. 297-98.
- 42 Ibid, p.p. 237-38.
- 43 Ibid, p. 83.
- 44 Ibid, p.309. Jung's philosophical approach is based on
this proposition. In Answer to Job, for example, he writes:

- 44 (cont) " 'Physical' is not the only criterion of truths: there are also psychic truths which can neither be explained nor proved nor contested in any physical way." (The Collected Works of C.G.Jung, Vol. 11, tr. by R.F.C.Hall, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 359.)
- 45 Introductory Lectures, p.356.
- 46 Jolande Jacobi, Complex/Archetype/Symbol, p.13.
- 47 Ibid, p.16.
- 48 The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, p. 575.
- 49 Ibid, p. 584.
- 50 Ibid, p. 565.
- 51 Ibid, p. 574.
- 52 New Introductory Lectures, p. 122.
- 53 The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, p.p.830-31.
- 54 Freud, Introductory Lectures, p. 279.
- 55 Civilization and Its Discontents, p.p.121-22.
- 56 The Ego and the Id. p.85.
- 57 NeO. Brown, Life Against Death, p.109.
- 58 p. 293.
- 59 Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 338.
- 60 Jacobi, Complex/Archetype/Symbol, p.18.
- 61 Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 354.
- 62 Freud, Introductory Lectures, p.120.
- 63 Jacobi, Complex/Archetype/Symbol, p. 186.
- 64 The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. X, tr. by James Strachey and Anna Freud (London, Hogarth, 1955), 104.
- 65 New Introductory Lectures.
- 66 Ibid. p.98.
- 67 Ibid. p. 97.

- 68 Freud, Introductory Lectures, p. 104.
 - 69 Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 82.
 - 70 Answer to Job, Collected Works, Vol 11, p. 383.
 - 71 Introductory Lectures, p. 133.
 - 72 Jacobi, Complex/Archetype/Symbol, p. 91.
 - 73 Freud, Introductory Lectures, p. 176.
 - 74 Jung, The Integration of the Personality, p.20.
 - 75 Ibid.
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Chapter 6

THE LAST GOD

As if he were the last god going home
Unto his last desire.

- From "The Man Against the Sky."

the man we call modern ... is by no means the average man. He is rather the man who stands upon a peak, or at the very edge of the world, the abyss of the future below him, above him the heavens, and below him the whole of mankind with a history that disappears in primeval mists.

- C. G. JUNG

The quality of indefiniteness which pervades any significant problem of a psychological nature, the contradictory character of human thought, feeling and conduct, the apparent lack of meaning in many manifestations of personality, the enigma of man's place in the 'Scheme', have all perplexed man for centuries and have incited literary activity - an activity which has aimed at the revelation of man in his several domains. Such revelation is, by its very nature, a highly personal and tentative achievement, and in this sense Robinson was correct when he said of man that 'Mostly alone he goes'¹ (p.60). Idealistically, the revelation is the sum of man's immortal vision; practically, it ensues from a firm grasp of actual life situations. Of course there have been numerous kinds of revealers. Some have endeavoured to reveal the mystery and have merely succeeded in mystifying the meaning. Others, inspirationalists immersed in their own mental and emotional mobility,

have followed the 'mad pursuit' - some for the sake of Art, some for the sake of Love, some for the sake of Knowledge. For the more mature, revelation has been a partial experience (correspondingly more trustworthy) bestowing an objective comprehension of things as well as a private feeling of empathy with one's fellow creatures. For the less fortunate - more ardent, hence more easily disillusioned - the pursuit has swallowed the pursuer : identity is lost and the mind confused. Such are the dwellers in the 'wrong world' of Amaranth, and artists like the 'painter sick at heart With Nature's toiling for a new surprise.' (p.62)

Those for whom the loss of ego-reality is disguised by a cult of personality ; or for whom life has become abstraction and living an intellectual exercise ; or for whom the personal ego has become inflamed to dementia praecox proportions, are reminiscent of certain unheroic heroes of the modern novel: for example, of the neo-Platonic Des Esseintes who, in Huysman's A Rebours, experimentally regards life as artifice ; of the neo-Nietzschean Jasper Ammen who, in Aiken's King Coffin, attempts to create pure form at the expense of life ; of the neo-Romantic Voss who, in the Patrick White novel, directs his pretentious energy towards the unoccupied throne of the God-head. Each, regarding himself as the genius and heir of a particular tradition, is blinded by the lights, by the devil in the sun, in his quest for an ultimate Revelation. Des Esseintes' final image of himself is of a man against the sky, "for whom only the impossible belief in a future life could bring him peace." His concluding words are about the travail of the human pilgrimage

" 'Well, it is all over now. Like a tide-race the waves of human mediocrity ^{are} and rising to the heavens and will engulf this refuge, for I am opening the flood-gates myself, against my will. Ah ! but my courage fails me, and my heart is sick within me ! - Lord, take pity on the Christian who doubts, or the unbeliever who would fain believe, or the galley-slave of life who puts out to sea alone, in the night beneath a firmament no longer lit by the consoling beacon-fires of the ancient hope ! " ²

Robinson has elaborated upon such thoughts as these in "The Man Against the Sky". He describes 'the ancient hope' as 'an orient Word that will not be erased.' The 'galley-slave' has perchance set out from

'the cold eternal shores

That look sheer down

To the dark tideless floods of Nothingness

Where all who know may drown.' (p.69)

The way of Ammen and Voss is through a door which opens out upon a vista such as this. They are men 'who know', but 'drown' because their knowledge is ^{only} ~~illusory~~. Their way culminates in immolation. The following lines from Robinson's poem provide an apt description of the plight of this type of human being, who

'with an aching strangeness viewed the last

Abysmal conflagration of his dreams, -'

and experienced

' a painful going down

From pictured heights of power and lost renown,

Revealed at length to his outlived endeavor

Remote and unapproachable forever.' (p.63) ³

Many of Robinson's characters are similarly self-absorbed. Even the most wordly, like King Jasper, reflect their material kingdoms subjectively. Matthias, Nightingale, Jasper, and Arthur developed the cult of the power-personality only to discover that it was of no avail against the rebellious forces which raged in their atrabilious inner kingdoms. For another group of people life has ceased to be the vital force which it once promised to be; as a result of various experiences of frustration, a barrier between the individual and reality has been continually bolstered until life is considered to be nothing more than an abstraction. Such displacement of energy is described in "Doctor of Billiard⁵" where life is symbolised by 'three spheres of insidious ivory' (p.345) and living has degenerated into a trivial form of manual exercise. The final displacement is, of course, in a mal-direction: the turning of energy against the self in the act of self-destruction. Both self-denial and self-indulgence may result in a similar loss of sensible reality. The woman in "The Unforgiven" denies herself in love because she refuses to forgive her husband; love turns to hate:

'she, the unforgiving, hates him

More for her lack than for her loss.' (p.38)

Robinson skillfully implies that her lack of forgiveness is a psychologically suspicious excuse for self-denial, and astutely

etches the frustration resulting from emotional and mental disparity. Apparently there is no revelation in sight for either of them,

'Although, to the serene outsider,

There still would seem to be a way.' (p.39)

Lorraine, on the other hand, is an unhappy example of a person whose catastrophe is a result of self-indulgence, although, at the end, she possesses a bitter shadow of self-revelation.

Robinson imagines that for another group, philosophers and scientists who adopt a materialist standpoint, life lacks meaning and purpose and is an intellectual abstraction. If such a person was the Man Against the Sky, Robinson conjectures,

'He may have seen with his mechanic eyes

A world without a meaning.' (p.64)

Others, suffering from a kind of ego-mania magnify their talent and ability and seek a revelation, a crown, which they were never meant to find. Robinson depicts one of them in "The Sunken Crown". He is described as a 'poor Narcissus out of school' who plunges into the depths where others have gone before and drowned. The poet concludes that

'The crown, if he is wearing it, may cool

His arrogance, and he may sleep again.' (p.345)

Robinson constantly issues the warning that man's desire for a comprehension above and beyond his mortality is a "Siege Perilous". In a poem which he thus entitles, he exposes the frailty of this desire in a person who mistook the crown of revelation for something inferior:

'The end he sought was not the end; the crown

He won shall unto many still be given.' (p.41)

The Metaphysician in "The Burning Book" is another severe example of 'An adept' who has 'nothing to teach' and 'leaves nothing behind him'. (p.48) A child may inadvertently possess gold that these men, who strive for it with dedication, shall never possess. In the sonnet "For Arvia", the poet tells the child on the occasion of her fifth birthday that she had 'the whole world to think about', and adds

'So let it be ; and let it all be fair -

For you, and for the rest who cannot share

Your gold of unrevealed awakenings.' (p.344)

The song of innocence is the song of unconscious revelation ; sheer being, sheer life. It was the song of Captain Craig remembered had once existed in 'A land of ruin, far away'. (p.77) It was a broken song which he tried to put together again.

The loss of ego-reality which some of the characters sustain sometimes results in neurosis - a sort of crustaceous covering for the decaying soul. Avon in Avon's Harvest is a good example. Although characters like the comic Miniver Cheevy and the pathetic John Evereldown are victims of phantasy (chivalrous and sexual phantasies respectively), their delusions are mild compared with Avon's. Avon's Harvest is a study in black of the disintegration of a single ego. For Avon there is no revelation, not even in death, only oblivion. His case may be labelled as that of the man against the sky who is driven by 'A crazed abhorrence of an old condition.' (p.65) He is a creature of darkness for whom

there is no light (not even a misleading one) but the caliginous fires of fear, and as such constitutes a warning ; but that is the poet's revelation not Avon's. And, perhaps for Robinson the final revelation^{has} at its core the fate of the individual soul ; the dream of the eternal image, of the intangible reality, of the man against the sky.

The desire for revelation is a human yearning irreconcilable with the inertia of ignorance. The young Robinson was painfully aware of the sacrifice which it could exact. Writing to Smith in 1897, he declared that "Nine tenths of the happiness in the world (if there is any) is due to man's ignorance of his own disposition. The happy people are they who never had time to think it over." ⁴ Here we have a fairly early testimony of his dissatisfaction with the efficiency of the pleasure-principle, although the essential emphasis is placed on the need to understand something of the inner human disposition; it is also interesting to note that he had developed a maturing confidence in his ability to do so. For, about a year before, the death of the poet's father in 1892, his biographer records, "Robinson himself, sure of nothing except the inadequacy of the human brain to explore the submerged nine-tenths of human experience, was ready to believe or disbelieve as the facts demanded." ⁵ After the publication of his early volumes, however, it had become evident that he possessed the talent to explore submerged experience. In 1920 he recorded with satisfaction that the character, Vickery, in "Vickery's Mountain"

was a thoroughly plausible creation. "Vickery's psychology is sound", he wrote Louis Ledoux.⁶ Robinson later explained that the poem was "a study of human inertia, which is in Vickery's case something stronger than he is,"⁷ and, in terms of the desire for revelation (symbolised by the desire for "gold"), Vickery fails to convert desire into action. The dying guest told Vickery where the gold was to be found at the base of the mountain, but this revelation in itself is not the important thing. The poet was concerned with the purely human problem of why Vickery still dreamed of being a "golden man" when he already possessed the knowledge with which to realise his dream. The reader thus asks why this is psychologically sound and looks to the poet for some kind of explanation. And the reader is justified, for it is this kind of meaning - revelation of the hidden springs of human nature - with which the poet was primarily preoccupied.

It should prove useful, therefore, to bear in mind Robinson's twofold distinction of the revelatory power : firstly the revelation of tenuous framework of belief, and, secondly revelation of the conglomerate house of pulsating and variegated life. He who has the former may, indeed, be a builder among the stars ; but the poet was more concerned with knowing what happened to the people who were led by the lure of light. The case of Leffingwell is rather typical.

'What quiverings in the distance of what light
May not have lured him with high promises,
And then gave out?' (p.331)

Robinson's house of life, however, is more earthly, more complex:

it includes a wide range of human beings from Tilbury Town to Camelot whose behaviour, motives, emotional and spiritual plight, unconscious needs and fears, and attitudes to life and death are revealed with singular intensity and versatility. It is evident, therefore, that in applying this term 'revelation' to the work of Robinson, it is necessary to distinguish between the metaphysical and psychological elements, the second groups of which predominates overwhelmingly in the final analysis. Use of the corresponding terms 'revelation' and 'self-revelation' is therefore inevitable. The poet's close friend, Louis Ledoux, alluded to this distinction, in an article entitled "Psychologist of New England", when he wrote:

"There will be some who criticize adversely Mr. Robinson's poetry because it concerns itself almost solely with the results of character in the world we know, and on the rare occasions when it touches metaphysical speculation is, in the main, negative rather than positive. To such critics poetry to be great poetry must express some positive faith as to the meaning and outcome of existence ; but the doctrine that Robinson preached, as all New Englanders must preach some doctrine, was of forgiveness through understanding in this life, and he left to others, with almost complete agnosticism as Schopenhauer did, speculation as to what is beyond ...

Mr. Robinson was primarily interested in individual character ; he probed and dug with zeal and indefatigable patience for those secret springs from which issue the actions and inactions whose aggregate make up life."

Revelation is here acknowledged purely in terms of individual psychology, while Robinson's metaphysical attitude can be described quite simply as an awareness of the irrevocable barrier separating finite knowledge and its revelation, on the one side, and infinite knowledge which cannot be revealed to man, on the other. His own comment that

"nothing of an infinite nature can be proven or disproven in finite terms - meaning words - and the rest is probably a matter of one's individual ways of seeing and feeling things."
9

provides ample verification. Of course he did recognise that man is disposed to imaginings of a visionary nature, and was prepared to assume that some have been capable of undeniable spiritual perceptions, even though they were by nature emancipated from the higher consciousness of pure revelation. This recognition validates the nodal importance of the Grail in the Arthurian poems, and the Word in "The Man Against the Sky",

'the living word

That none alive has ever heard

Of ever spelt,

And few have ever felt

Without the fears and old surrenderings

And terrors.' (p.68]

It is characteristic of this poet that in the same breath as he acknowledges sublime feeling he admits primal fear into the context; and issues a warning that mystical revelation is an emotional hazard which may result in psychic debility. Moreover, mysticism

rests on an inconclusive hypothesis as he once explained in anti-Romanticist terms :

"I suppose you will have to put me down as a mystic, if that means a man who cannot prove all his convictions to be true". 10

Robinson did indeed believe in the mystical and creative unconscious just as he acknowledged man's innate propensity for evil, and he would probably have agreed with Jung when the psychologist describes "that spirit which nowadays is called the Unconscious" 11 in the following manner:

"it is as refractory as matter, as mysterious and evasive, and it follows laws which in their inhuman and superhuman character mostly appear to us as a crimen laesae maiestatis humane. When man lays his hand to this work, he ^{repeats} respects, as the alchemists say, the creative work of God." 11

'Laws' that operate in a biological medium, therefore, have psychic and 'superhuman' significance, - a thought which Robinson expressed beautifully, but tragically, in "For a Dead Lady" :

'The beauty, shattered by the laws
That have creation in their keeping,
No longer trembles at applause,
Or over children that are sleeping;
And we who delve in beauty's lore
Know all that we have known before
Of what inexorable cause
Makes Time so vicious in his reaping.' (p.355)

This stanza, contrasting human knowledge with an absolute, is a

practical demonstration of the Robinsonian distinction between the fact of mortality and the futility of metaphysics. The poet was chary of over-intellectualising humanity and violating reality, as do "most people" who "are so afraid of life that when they see it coming their first impulse is to get behind a tree and shut their eyes." ¹² This is evident in a remark he made to Nancy Evans, although it appears that in this context he adheres to some tangible principle of psychological determinism. The theme Miss Evans discussed with the poet in this connection concerned man as "the storehouse of his own destiny" :

" "I think man's pattern is there before him",

Mr. Robinson said, And then he added, "that it's difficult to discuss these ideas, we're getting metaphysical and over terminology may mean such different things." ¹³ "

It has, however, been terminologically impossible (even allowing for Robinson's warning) to avoid becoming 'metaphysical', to avoid referring, for example, to 'revelation' without implying 'knowledge'; indeed the two terms are almost inseparable in most instances. But it is clear from the preceding paragraphs that such terms as 'revelation' and 'self-revelation', which have been adequately distinguished, and 'knowledge' and 'self-knowledge' are useful, critical aids. Nor should it be forgotten that this terminology is Robinson's anyway : the verb 'to know', for example, recurs constantly in a multitude of contexts in Robinson's work, ranging from positive to negative in implications; while it is often used ironically, as in the tantalising last line (tantalising to the critics at least) of "The Man Against the Sky". This line -

"Where all who know may drown" - refers to the philosophers and practitioners of materialism who commit the Robinsonian sin of exclusiveness in their failure to distinguish between finite and infinite, and in their failure to acknowledge the eternal possibility to which the limitations of their knowledge must inevitably lead....

'Eternity records

Too vast an answer for the time-born words

We spell' (p.68)

It is all so dubious and inconclusive, Robinson declares, that one invites the infliction of illusion in claiming exclusive validity for any branch of knowledge, or current point of view, the world has managed to accumulate. And, in this vein, he admits a conditional universal^a affirmation in what may be considered the main test of the Robinsonian Metaphysic :

'Where was he going, this man against the sky?

You know not, nor do I.

But this we know, if we know anything:

That we may laugh and fight and sing

And of our transience here make offering

To an orient Word that will not be erased,

Or, save in incommunicable gleams

Too permanent for dreams,

Be found or known.' (p.66)

Thus the poet states agnostically that the ultimate revelation is 'incommunicable' and unknowable, while his cautious but circumscribing use of 'if we know anything' shows how small human knowledge is in face of the vast Unknown. In the much

earlier poem the author referred to as "my uncomfortable
¹⁴
 abstraction called "Luke Havergal",¹⁴ Robinson apparently
 invoked in the mind of the central character the overwhelming
 possibility that, if he were to thrust uncertainty aside and
 take the leap of faith into death, he would be reunited with his
 lost love. 'But what kind of a revelation is this?' readers
 and critics have asked for over sixty years; and will continue
 to ask, for the poem has "force enough to run a saw mill", as
¹⁵
 the poet once wrote of Wuthering Heights.¹⁵ Incidentally, a
 comparison with that novel is not without justification : in
 spirit and atmosphere, Luke Havergal is a miniature Heathcliff
 and the poem a cameo of Wuthering Heights. At any rate, it is
 perhaps appropriate to observe the cautionary and ironic clue
 which Robinson affords the bewildered reader, and also to note
 another use of the qualifying 'if anything', when he suggests that
 'The dark will end the dark, if anything':

'No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies
 To rift the fiery night that's in your eyes;
 But there, where western glooms are gathering,
 The dark will end the dark, if anything:
 God slays Himself with every leaf that flies,
 And hell is more than half of paradise,
 No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies -
 In eastern skies.' (p.74)

"The Man Against the Sky" is a good example of the
 Robinsonian distrust of any knowledge or viewpoint which is
 proclaimed to be exclusive in matters of fundamental importance ;

and in this poem he attacks materialism for what it excludes and denies as well as for what it is. "Luke Havergal", on the other hand, is a dissimulation of belief, so far as the poet is concerned, for he remains completely outside his creation, thus obeying the Flaubertian dictum which he so much admired. And its fiery tone implies with paradoxical certainty that the situation calls not for knowledge but for "faith", which in this case is a rationalization more akin to a frenzy of expectation. It is a poem built to the specification of brilliant persuasion, imagistic simplicity, and emotive undertow. Progressing through feeling rather than cerebration, besides maintaining the tension between biological desire and hallucination, the poem gradually communicates all the aching frustration, the loneliness, the desire for imperishable union through perishable death, in the soul of Luke Havergal. The progression is one towards greater and greater inclusiveness and is effected largely through rhythm (even colours and shades have rhythmic life); paradox ('fiery night', 'quench the kiss'); and contrast ('eastern skies' and 'western gate', 'heaven' and 'hell'). Movement is its symbol : the contrary winds of dying and undying in the cyclone of "degeneration".¹⁶ The poem demonstrates that intensity of revelation withheld in the flux of widening inclusiveness and emerging enlightenment which is a part of Robinson's psychological method. Rollo Walter Brown made a studied observation of this as a personal quality in Robinson the man, having seen its day-by-day manifestations in the poet's personality. After referring to Robinson's 'humour', 'reticence', 'stout-heartedness', 'generosity', he says :

"But perhaps the chief revelation of his eminence of spirit was his curious, inverted way of simplifying things. Instead of trying to make a thing clear by seeing a little of it at a time, or by stripping so much away that less than the thing itself remained, he was forever trying to make it clear by discovering if it were not a part of something more inclusive. If that were true, and he could only encompass this more inclusive something, then all would be clear. No matter how small the detail of life, the frame of reference in which he measured it was of things presumably - or at least possibly - important. In consequence, the literal appearance of things, the mere literal recording of appearances, interested him little, or not at all.

What he wanted to know was the inclusive story behind the appearances - the story behind this man's or that woman's conduct. When the story was not obvious, he would shake his head and say, "There must be something there." And sometimes he tried to find it - while he ate a sandwich or one of his specially ripened bananas, or calmly drank a good-sized thermos bottle of coffee."

17

This admirable quality is often most perfectly evident in a poetic form to which Robinson conformed with originality and for which his synthesising powers were called upon to the utmost. And in some of the dramatic monologues, some of the blank verse

narratives, and in the sonnets especially, rendering of
 the inclusiveness and synthesis is that of a superb stylist.

R.A. Robinson is the twentieth-century master of the traditional
 sonnet. He makes this rigid and exacting form suit so admirably
 his unexalted manner as well as his purposes which include

spiritual and psychological revelation, and the evocation of
 atmosphere, situation, time, and timelessness. Consider with
 what facility and beauty of expression this latter group of
 qualities is evoked in "The Sheaves" and "Sundew", two of

the most perfect sonnets in the English language. The revelation
 of the essential element of a problem - the key fact of a story,
 or the "something more inclusive" - is generally achieved with
 such fluidity that the impact of the poem, the import of what has

been communicated, is realised in that suspension of time and
 space, that projection of a psychic dimension, which is the work
 of art. The author temporarily holds back the 'key fact' in

"Haunted House", and "Richard Cory". In "Haunted House", for
 example, he adumbrates a gloomy scene of ruin and records the

reactions of a group of people (including himself) to it by means
 of skilful indirection, preparatory to the revelation of the
 murder 'long before' which is the climax of the poem. The

range of time hovers about the appropriate element of mystery:
 the impossibility of ever knowing the full story. Three examples
 of the revelation of "the inclusive story behind the appearances"
 are "An Evangelist's Wife", "Ben Trivato", and "Reuben Bright".

The first of these sonnets is a dramatic monologue in which
 the trusted wife diagnoses her jealousy and her relationship
 with her unfaithful, Evangelist husband. The first line,

"Why am I not myself these many days", reveals the symptom of her condition; the next eleven lines contain the crux of her frustration ; and the last two lines subtly indicate the inclusive factor, which is not (as may be expected) her jealousy (already acknowledged) but her husband's hypocrisy :

"In David's time poor Michal had to go.

Jealous of God? Well, if you like it so." (p.528)

The poem, therefore, led up inferentially to the fact of the Evangelist's hypocrisy until it was unfolded through the allusion in the couplet. The wife compares herself to Michal, David's first wife who, through circumstances, was estranged from her husband and later supplanted by two other wives. Her husband evidently rationalised his behaviour with the assertion that it was the will of God that he take another woman. ¹⁸ "Ben Trevato" contains the same sort of progressive elucidation, which is held back almost entirely until the ^Ssextet where it is economically compacted. Ben Trevato, blind, dying, and almost delirious, dreams not of his wife but of another woman. His desiring and the generous spirit and forgiving nature of his wife who, by "a stratagem", pretends she is the other woman, are the inclusive factors and are effectively incorporated in the last line :

"He felt the other woman in the fur

That now the wife had on. Could she forgive

All that? Apparently. Her rings were gone

Of course; and when he found that she had none,

He smiled - as he had never smiled at her." (pp.575-76).

In "Reuben Bright", on the other hand, Robinson reversed the

natural order of presentation, in a most satisfying way, for the purpose of a climax which blends action with unexpectedness. Instead of retracing mental events from the symptomatic clue through to the disclosure of the inclusive element, he begins with the reason why and makes the final revelation the symptomatic act. Thus the orthodox psychological approach is, as it were, turned upside-down and events are related in their actual time-sequence. The inclusive factor is the butcher's deep grief at his wife's death and the symptomatic act (in the last line) is his tearing down of the slaughter-house. The last four lines are an ingenious psychologically accurate example of contrast, displacement and sublimated aggression :

'He packed a lot of things that she had made
Most mournfully away in an old chest
Of hers, and put some chopped up cedar-boughs
In with them, and tore down the slaughter-house' (p.92)

The powerful originality of this ending is undeniable, while in many of the other sonnets succinct appraisal and profound intuition are not marred by the inevitable generalisation which the last one or two lines demand. The conclusion of "Souvenir" illustrates the artistic use of these praiseworthy qualities:

'And though a child, I knew it was the voice
Of one whose occupation was to die.' (p.510)

This brief analysis of the three sonnets offers some indication of the integral importance of the inclusive factor and the contribution which its disclosure makes towards a wider understanding of human nature. However, knowledge does not necessarily

presuppose understanding, while understanding imposes its own responsibilities. Thus, the perceptions of the Evangelist's wife make life difficult for her; Ben Trovato's comprehension accords with desire but not with reality ; and Reuben Bright's act is comprehensible but futile, even though the futility is psychologically understandable. Robinson demonstrates in the sonnets, as well as elsewhere, the paradox of knowledge - it is the instrument by which its own inadequacies are exposed - and the appropriateness of humility. The limitation of knowledge is the theme of "Discovery", a lesser sonnet which concludes with an aphoristic turn of phrase too much akin to cliché :

'we were still to learn

That earth has not a school where we may go

For wisdom, or for more than we may know.' (p.510)

The limitation of knowledge in personal relationships is often extremely consequential in the opinion of the poet. Unawareness, however, may be a blessing in some instances. The wife in "Firelight" has her secret 'thoughts ... of one who shines Apart, and would be hers if he had known' (p.511), but yet has been blissfully married for ten years. The achievement of self-knowledge and its results are also thematic ingredients in some of the sonnets. "Cliff Klingenhagen" and "Vain Gratuities" are examples of the accrusement of tempered wisdom, and the same may be said of the less serene "The Tree in Pamela's Garden"; whereas "The Growth of Lorraine" has a less happy frame of reference - death and the shattered flesh. And it is evident that revelation itself is a frame of reference indispensable to

the growth of spirit and mind, yet a potential disease to both when misapplied.

Robinson was always in search of 'inclusive factors'. His achievement may well lie in his expression of the ultimate conviction that the understanding of self and of things exclusively human provides the primary ambition of intelligence and love. And he was possibly never more acutely aware of this, as well as of the eternal quest imposed by existence, when he concluded "John Brown" with the illustrious and portentous words -

'I go

By the short road that mystery makes long

For man's endurance of accomplishment.

I shall have more to say when I am dead.' (p.490)

NOTES

- 1 In another connection, Robinson said the same thing to R.W.Brown when explaining why he was writing the long poems despite some general disapproval "They happen to be the thing that's in my blood", he said, "so I've got to write them. No sir-r ! Mostly we go alone. And if a man hasn't learned that, he hasn't learned anything." (Next Door to a Poet, p. 48.)
- 2 Huysmans, J.-K., Against Nature, tr. by Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1959), pp. 219-20.
- 3 Italics mine - S.C.H.
- 4 Untriangulated Stars, p.p. 284-85.
- 5 Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson, p. 59.
- 6 Selected Letters, p. 66.
- 7 Ibid, p. 104.

- 8 The Saturday Review of Literature (Oct.19, 1935), p.4.
- 9 Selected Letters, p.p. 165-66.
- 10 Ibid, p. 160.
- 11 Psychological Reflections, p. 25.
- 12 Selected Letters, p. 168.
- 13 "Edwin Arlington Robinson", Bookman (Nov., 1932), 678.
- 14 Selected Letters, p. 30.
- 15 Ibid, p. 25.
- 16 Robinson once remarked that the poem was "a piece of deliberate degeneration." (Untriangulated Stars, p.238.)
- 17 Next Door to a Poet, p.p.51-2.
- 18 It is impossible to vouch for the complete validity of this interpretation for it must be admitted that the reader has only the wife's word for her husband's misdemeanours. Hence it might be possible to argue that the woman is in a neurotic frame of mind and liable to falsify the situation with obsessional imaginings. It seems to the present writer, however, that this alternative view appears less plausible. Barnard's opinion adds weight to this conclusion. He writes : "An Evangelist's Wife ... shows a woman near the breaking point as she listens to her husband's sanctimonious denials of adultery." (Edwin Arlington Robinson, p.137.)

